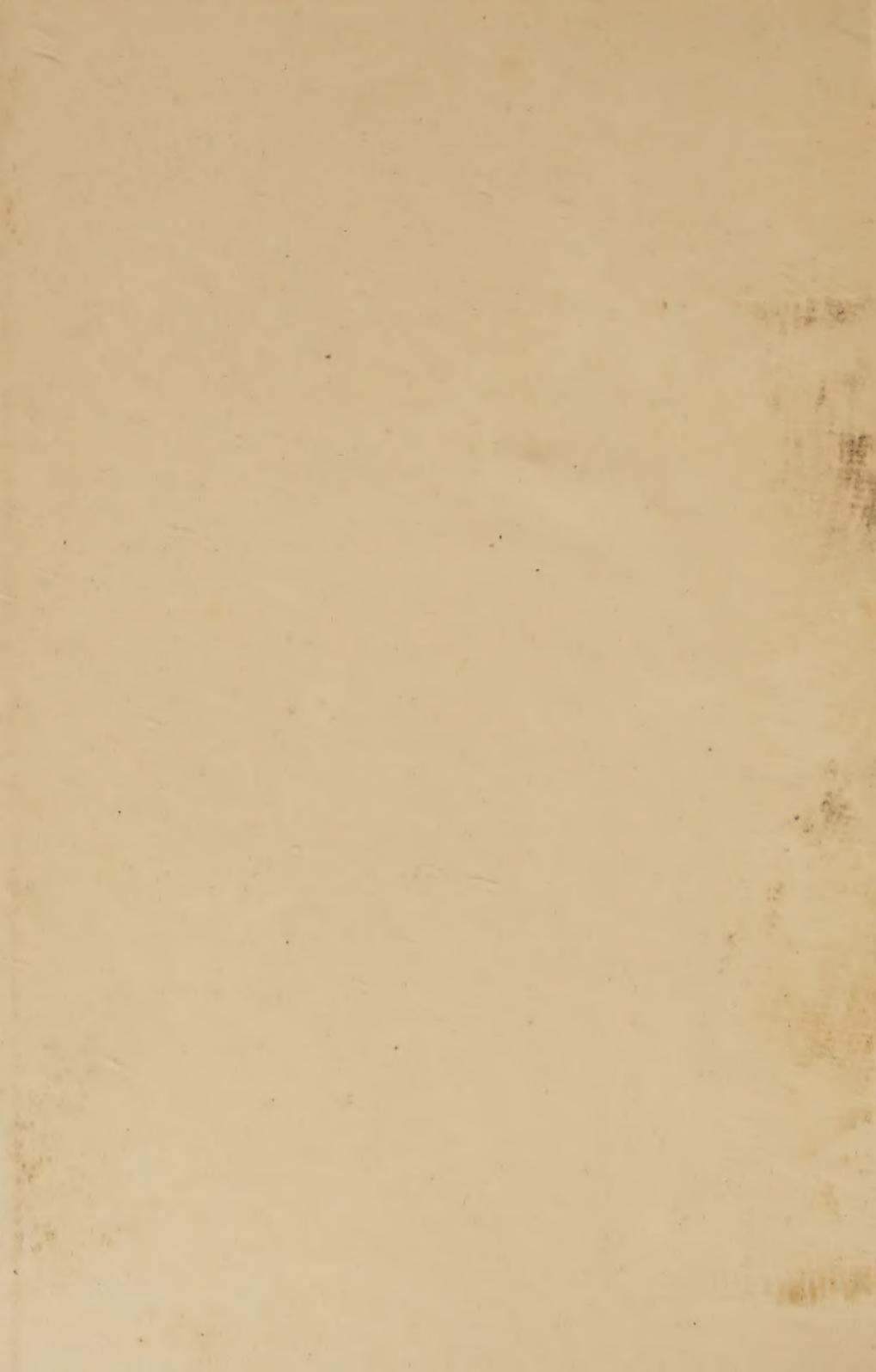




THE  
STATUE  
EDEN PHILIPOTTIS  
AND  
ARNOLD BENNETT







# THE STATUE







"Do you wish to ruin me with your caprices?" he cried.

# THE STATUE

*A STORY OF INTERNATIONAL  
INTRIGUE AND MYSTERY*

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

AND

ARNOLD BENNETT

Illustrated by

T. K. HANNA

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## CHAPTER I

### THE UNVEILING

“**I**SUPPOSE the great moment has come,” said Maurice Courlander to his friend Emile Berger.

He accompanied the words with a short ironic laugh; but beneath that laugh there were seriousness, anxiety, perhaps fear; it was an instinctive attempt to mask profound mental disturbance. Maurice was tall, dark, with splendid black hair (in faultless trim), and impassioned eyes which, like his long, restless hands, revealed the changing moods of an irresolute but ardent soul. Owing partly to his temperament and partly to the agreeable disadvantages of extreme wealth, Maurice, though twenty-eight years of age, had not yet adopted an entirely definite attitude towards the universe.

“Lord Doncastle and your sister have not finished their discussion,” replied Emile, with a French inflection. He was a blond Gaul, of Maurice’s age, and might have come straight from the Latin quarter, by way of Bond Street.

“Will they ever?” Maurice murmured.

The two young men stood at the garden end of the immense central hall of Tudor Hundreds, the

body's feelings. And that is something. Moreover, he was a dilettante of genius—you could see it in the fine curves of his nostrils—a bidder of gigantic bids at Christie's, incapable of being satisfied with the second-rate. And then there were his entertainments, his cook, and his marvellously discreet and perfect manners. When he had resolved to marry, he knocked boldly at august portals which were seldom opened, but whose guardians had just read in a corner of a paper written by aristocrats for aristocrats a nice calculation of his income per minute. He had been received with fervour.

"Now, Maurice," he murmured to his son. It was surprising how that mild voice carried across the length of the hall.

Maurice made a sign to a couple of servants, who simultaneously drew aside two curtains which had completely covered the double glass door leading to the south terrace, and the exterior prospect was exposed to view.

The great moment, as Maurice had phrased it to Berger, emphatically *had* come. And the whole company felt that it had come. Carl Courlander, with the quiet instinct for the dramatic which he possessed, and with that childlike naïveté which is so frequently a characteristic of rulers, had somewhat ingeniously led up to the moment. For nearly a year no one had been invited to Tudor Hundreds; officially, the demesne had been closed, and the Courlander entertainments given either at the town

house in Hamilton Place or at the châlet on the Norman coast between Honfleur and Trouville. Then had arrived curiously worded invitations to the selectest persons in London to journey down to Bedfordshire on a certain day at a certain hour by special train. Before half-past one on the day when those invitations were delivered it was known at the restaurants where the selectest persons lunch almost exactly who had, and who had not, been invited. (The clubs, no longer able to compete with the restaurants, learnt the news about whiskey-and-soda time in the afternoon.) There were jealousies; but they were futile, because not a single individual had been asked who was not high enough to smile indulgently at jealousy.

As the day approached, it began to be said that, having regard to the increasingly acute crisis in international politics, Lord Doncastle would not be able to leave London. Nevertheless Lord Doncastle was discovered at the book-stall at King's Cross station arguing with the book-stall clerk that it would pay Smith & Son to keep a supply of *The Flautist*, a monthly journal devoted to the interests of flute-players. Lord Doncastle had a passion for flute-playing. During the journey down to Dunstable, the occupants of the single Pullman, of which the special train consisted, discussed, not the European crisis, but the nature of the thing which old Courlander had got up his sleeve. Many of them would perhaps have liked to discuss the crisis also, but Lord Don-

castle said that he knew nothing about it, and would insist on explaining to everybody that, as regards flute-stops, the Rudell-Carte system of 1867 had never yet been surpassed and never would be.

Then the motor-cars which met the train at Dunstable had not entered Tudor Hundreds through the gardens, as was the old informal custom, but by the grand gates, so that nobody had seen the gardens. And tea, instead of being served on the south terrace as usual in June, had been served in the hall. And each guest had noticed that the south windows were curtained. And no guest had asked why; because, even though you were a Prime Minister and Carl Courlander was the mildest man on earth, you did not ask Carl Courlander that sort of question; you restrained your curiosity.

And now the curtains were withdrawn and the doors opened, and the guests passed out on to the terrace.

“The Crampirons are not come, sonnie,” Carl Courlander whispered to Maurice as he went by him in the rear of the procession.

“No!” Maurice muttered shortly, and flushed.

Carl gave a gesture to indicate the wisdom of being resigned. Then he turned to Lord Doncastle, the prince, and a charitable peeress, who stood foremost among the spectators, and who made no more effort than did the rest to curb their astonishment and pleasure.

And amid the chorus of applause, the vehement

congratulations, the ecstatic monosyllables, and the little inarticulate cries of wonderment, he scarcely attempted to conceal his amiable and just pride. He had a good deal to be proud of. Where forty or fifty acres of informal gardens and four hundred and fifty acres of undulating park land had previously existed, there was now the hugest formal garden in all England. From the terrace of the Renaissance façade, which was a couple of hundred feet in length, descended broad steps in four flights of ten each, separated the one from the other by parterres and verdure. Then spread out a vast lawn, regularly broken by statuary, fountains, and topiary work; east and west of the lawn, alleys bordered by trimmed box and other trees led away to other basins and other sculptured water-gods. From the lawn, still downwards, another quadruple flight of steps drew the eyes to a vast cruciform canal, whose great arm, running due south, was half a mile in length. At the nearer end a boathouse in white marble had been built in the form of a temple. The side-arms of the canal were flanked by trees. And at the farther extremity of the greater arm, three-quarters of a mile from the house, a magnificent double row of elms climbed a broad slope of green, thus raising the eye again to the height from which it had started. These elms were practically all that remained of the old park and gardens.

The sun shone nobly on the pure and stately archi-

tecture of the façade, and on the brilliant, variegated assortment of frocks, light suits, and parasols which populated the terrace. It did not disdain the eye-glasses of Lord Doncastle, as he stood, smiling at Millicent Courlander, with one hand touching the hot stone of the terrace balustrade; nor the fine emerald rings of the charitable Marchioness of Herm; nor the bald head which Sir Louis Bartram stroked with a surgeon's finger; nor the pale, inquisitive lawyer's nose of Sir Francis Parculier. It was absolutely impartial. And to the marvels created by Carl Courlander, and gazed on by his guests, it added the final touch of splendour, gleaming on the long water of the canal, catching the spray of the aspiring fountains, giving life to the sward and to the flowers, and at the same time somehow emphasising the solitude of the scene. How many thousands of men Carl Courlander had employed to produce all that magic in less than a year Carl Courlander alone knew. But not a soul was visible over the entire sun-steeped expanse.

"My dear Courlander," Lord Doncastle exclaimed with his slight lisp, "I've visited you here for a dozen years now, and, upon my soul, I don't recognise the place. Is it a delusion, or an illusion?"

"It's a Versailles," said the marchioness.

"I have not seen Versailles," said the prince. He seemed to meditate an instant, caressing the ferocity of his moustache; small-talk was not his specialty. Then he added: "But my father has."

This delicate Prussian allusion to the war of 1870 caused Emile Berger to exchange a grimace with Maurice.

"Versailles has been my model," said Carl Courlander softly. "It could scarcely be improved on."

"And what's that curious white thing?" asked Lord Donastle.

"Yes, whatever can it be?" echoed the marchioness, who spent the chief part of her time in teaching thrift and resignation to the poor of Limehouse. "I'm sure you've got the most delicious surprise for us!" And she opened her small moist mouth like a child expectant of jujubes.

At the summit of the far-off avenue of elms an immense mass of white could be discerned. It was much higher than the elms. And it was calculated to excite the curiosity of the least inquisitive people. For it was not a building, and it could not be a tent. It resembled more than anything a screen for a giant magic-lantern.

"Ah!" answered Carl Courlander. "We shall see. Mamma!" He beckoned to his wife, the comfortable Lady Mary.

Lady Mary advanced to an apparatus with a handle that had been affixed to the balustrade of the terrace.

"Do I pull it like this?" she inquired with her simple air.

"No, mamma, the other way," said Maurice, indulgently.

And she looked up at him, thinking what a clever, omniscient son she had. Timidly she hesitated.

"What the devil is it?" muttered the eminent surgeon to the eminent lawyer on the edge of the crowd. "Surely Courlander hasn't been guilty of a mere millionaire's freak."

"One never knows," returned the eminent lawyer, whose experiences had taught him to be startled by nothing except honesty.

"Now, mother dear!" said Millicent Courlander, persuasively. "It won't harm you. It isn't a mouse. Just pull it."

At this juncture occurred an interruption. And throughout the group there was an involuntary movement of impatience at the interruption. The fact was that people were more excited than they imagined themselves to be. A feverish perturbation, at that period, was in the very air of England. And nerves, especially the nerves of the leaders of men, were in a sensitive condition. Carl Courlander had already sufficiently heightened, by many small touches, the emotional effect of the proceedings. He had chosen an agitated week for this singular ceremony —he who was himself the very centre of this agitation. He had got Doncastle down. And everybody was perfectly aware that, despite Doncastle's serene affectations of the lackadaisical, not another man in the kingdom could have persuaded Doncastle to leave Downing Street during those critical days. He had enhanced mystery by the phraseology of his in-

vitation and his curtaining of windows. He staggered the party by the sudden revelation of colossal gardens magically fashioned in the utmost secrecy. And then there was this tantalising white affair in the far distance, and the handle on the terrace balustrade which Lady Mary Courlander seemed almost afraid to touch. And finally there was the interruption—in the shape of two persons, an oldish man and a young woman.

“Well, I’m ——!” the eminent surgeon murmured. His demeanour signified to the eminent lawyer that surprise had robbed him even of the power to finish the sentence.

And indeed, as regards the whole company, a lively and interested astonishment co-existed with its politely veiled impatience.

Certainly the late-arriving couple were not of such a type as leaves the spectator indifferent. The girl, who was very beautiful, had the quivering sensitiveness and overflowing activity of a racehorse. There was vitality in every part of her, and her dark and changeful eyes, and the rich curves of her body, and the restless colour in her cheeks, and the continuous expressive gestures of her arms, all showed in her the pure abundance of essential life. She was dressed in black, and a black feather from her hat fell over a nape covered with delicious down. She took, as it were, the terrace by storm. She sprang swiftly upon Lady Mary and passionately embraced her. One could see that Lady Mary’s indolent, angelic good-

ness had utterly conquered the innocent and eager heart.

"Father's fault, of course!" the girl whispered.

"Let me present you to the prince, dear Norah!" said Lady Mary. "Prince, Miss Crampiron."

Instantly Norah Crampiron's manner altered to a self-contained and prim dignity which would have been laughable if it had not been genuinely impressive. She gave the prince a curtsey that could not have been equalled in Berlin, though it might have found a match in Madrid. Then she drew swiftly back.

"Prince, Mr. Crampiron."

"But I know Mr. Crampiron," cried the prince. "We have met at Charlottenberg, *nicht wahr?*"

It was not surprising that the prince should have been already acquainted with Abraham Crampiron. In the complex operations of European finance Crampiron was as prominent a personage as Carl Courlander himself, and though more intimately connected with Paris, he was extremely familiar with the bourses of the various German capitals. Indeed, wherever millions were manipulated, that powerful, rough-cast figure, which had arisen strangely out of South Africa many years ago, that figure with the mighty head, large nose and mouth and huge hands, was known and was feared. No one in Europe had known his wife, who had died before the end of his African era; but some said that she had had a little Portuguese blood in her.

"Well, I'm ——" repeated the surgeon, eyeing

Norah, who had kissed Millicent and old Courlander, and whose hand Maurice had now taken with a particularity which could mean only one thing.

"I don't see why you should be —, Sir Louis," said the lawyer.

"But it's war to the knife between them, and yet he's here, on this day of all days!"

"You really ought not to use old-fashioned terms like that, Sir Louis," the lawyer protested. "There's no such thing as war to the knife nowadays. There's nothing but healthy competition. Why shouldn't competitors be friends? And I suppose you know that their children are engaged to be married."

"I am acquainted with that fact," said the surgeon, in a lower tone. "And I beg to repeat that I'm —. Their children had no business to be engaged. The whole situation is impossible. Their estates practically adjoin; their offspring are to unite. And yet they are fighting like tigers, and the peace of Europe is at stake. To-day the battle is at its height—every one knows that—and this is the day they choose to shake hands like cronies. It's sheer bravado on some one's part, that's what it is!"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

A buzz in the group from which they had separated themselves caused them to turn. Lady Mary had at last pulled the inexplicable handle in front of her. And lo! The distant white screen tore itself into fragments and fluttered away in every direction

like a capricious flight of wild doves. And there stood revealed a heroic, a gigantic statue, puissant, formidable, and glorious—magnificently shining in its whiteness at the summit of the avenue of elms. It represented a woman, classically robed, and with a pointed crown on her head. Her right arm carried a sword; her left, with one finger outstretched, held the Jovian thunderbolt to her tremendous bosom. Hope seemed to reside in that wide-eyed, expectant face, and the attitude was one of pressing forward—pressing forward with resistless and relentless force.

And the statue topped the highest trees. It must have been a couple of hundred feet high. It was easily the largest piece of sculpture in Europe that Carl Courlander had erected there.

“And what does it mean?” demanded the marchioness, when the excitement had a little abated.

“Ask the artist,” said Carl Courlander, pointing to Emile Berger.

Emile was as red as a red rose.

“You the artist?” The marchioness impulsively took the young man’s hand. “You are a perfect dear! You have genius!”

“That is why he received the commission,” said Carl Courlander.

“The statue is meant to signify Energy,” Emile stammered, besieged on all sides.

“Why Energy?” Lord Doncastle asked nonchalantly.

“It was just my idea,” said Emile.

"Why do sculptors never carve the statue of Indifference—the greatest of all the virtues?" the Prime Minister demanded of no one in particular, and as no one in particular replied, he turned to Millicent and gazed at her with his gentlemanly eyes. He had been gazing at her in exactly the same manner for seven years past.

The statue completed the vista in the most imposing manner. Itself and its situation had been adapted to each other with distinguished artistic tact and skill. It was lovely. It was a vision, a dream, a miracle. It was what you will. But nevertheless it was profoundly curious. Its oddness was disconcerting. Why its exaggerated vastness? Why indeed did it exist at all? What did it *mean*? In every breast was the secret thought that Carl Courlander had not erected that statue there for nothing. Yet why?

"It is a millionaire's freak, after all," said the eminent lawyer in a cautious whisper.

"Don't be too sure," replied Sir Louis.

"You've no more surprises by any chance?" Lord Doncastle inquired, with a fatigued and charming smile.

"Yes," said Courlander, quietly. "One. I hope it will be agreeable. Instead of going back to town at once, you will all do me the honour of dining with me in the statue, quite informally. I apologise for the short notice, but the scheme only occurred to me this morning."

"*In* the statue? How lovely!" chanted the marchioness.

"But, my dear fellow, I really can't stay," said Lord Doncastle, putting his arm into Courlander's, and drawing him away.

"I beg," Courlander insisted with the force of his mild suavity; and added in a peculiar tone: "I shall have news for you."

"Here?"

"Here."

**Lord Doncastle stayed.**

## CHAPTER II

### WAR

**A**MONG the party there were no less than three keepers of diaries—individuals who meant to astonish the world one day by stout tomes crammed with anecdotic revelations. They had a glorious time.

For the rending of the veil before the statue by no means brought the supply of wonders to an end. When the guests had wandered up and down the length of the canal, and inspected the boat-house and essayed a couple of gondolas, and at last been permitted to approach the statue, they were, all of them, more profoundly impressed than ever. They were, indeed, thrilled. To see the statue from a distance was sensational; to stand under it, to gaze up at the soaring height of the gigantesque figure, was overwhelming. Even Lord Doncastle, nervously passing his hand through his thin sandy-grey hair, had lost his nonchalance. And then Carl Courlander had opened a door disguised in the key pattern of the hem of the statue's robe; and the company had entered the amazing electrically-lit interior of Emile Berger's masterpiece, and, in sections of four, they had been shot up in a lift to the higher regions, and had found

themselves in an immense white chamber, artificially lighted, but lighted also by one opalescent window, through which came the rays of the descending sun. That window, as Carl informed them, was a jewel in a ring on the third finger of the statue's left hand; and it overlooked a hundred square miles of the home counties. The conception was terrific. It awed the blasé, and even the frivolous. And the mystery of Carl Courlander's reason for erecting the statue became portentous and alarming.

Then the dinner!

The dinner alone would have made the fortune of any diary. If a powder cask and a few live coals had been at large under the magnificent mahogany, the dinner could scarcely have been more exciting than it was, or more unusual—unusual, that is to say, considered as a repast presided over by Carl Courlander. The invariable practice of Carl Courlander was to permit absolute freedom in the choice of topics of conversation. Indeed it would have been difficult to find subjects of public interest in which he or his guests were not personally involved. He only insisted that arguments should be characterised by an absence of emotional heat. What made this dinner so highly unusual was that the arguments were not characterised by an absence of emotional heat. Politeness covered the heat, but with a very thin crust. The dinner became dangerous—one of those dinners at which, as they proceed, you begin to say to yourself that anything may happen; one of those din-

ners at which even the greediest forget what they are eating.

The situation was singular in an extreme degree.

Everybody knew, every newspaper reader in England knew, that Germany was competing with France in the matter of a large loan to the Sultan of Morocco. Everybody knew that France hotly resented Germany's financial intrusiveness. Everybody knew that France was allowing the semi-official business competition to proceed out of sheer diplomatic discretion, and that if she were worsted in the rivalry of negotiations with the Sultan, she would at once formally declare her suzerainty over the Sultan. Everybody knew that if France did this, Germany would choose to consider herself insulted and would go to war. And everybody knew, further, that, though England was not directly concerned, the English government was in an excessively rickety condition, and that only a dangerous European war could save it, the English public having the excellent habit of never swapping horses while crossing a stream.

What everybody did not know, but what all the guests of Carl Courlander knew, was that in the matter of the competing negotiations for the loan, two English financiers really stood for the rival nations. The success of Germany depended on the house of Courlander. The success of France depended on the house of Crampiron. It often occurs in international finance that the centres of activity are far from where

they are imagined to be. Each house had the control of ten millions of money, underwritten by combinations of satellite firms, and ready to be disbursed under the ægis of Germany and France respectively as soon as the price of issue and the rate of interest could be arranged. It was a question of only half a crown per cent. The Sultan was dallying in the hope of a diminution of half a crown per cent. The peace of Europe and the existence of the English government depended on half a crown per cent. And Courlander and Crampiron and Lord Doncastle sat there at the same table.

A unique tit-bit for diarists!

The suppressed volcanoes were Abraham Crampiron and, curiously, Maurice Courlander. Once or twice Maurice had deliberately foiled his father's attempts to shift the conversation away from the too-absorbing topic of the hour. He was in a strange, pugnacious mood, and his behaviour belied his upbringing. As for Crampiron, his daughter, who understood him, feared one of those outbreaks which she knew so well. The immediate cause of the trouble was Lord Doncastle's urbane, incorrigible lack of seriousness. It amused many people exceedingly, but there were others whom it exceedingly exasperated. Nobody was more surprised than Lord Doncastle when volcanoes became active.

"I have never really understood the money market and so I'm afraid I don't understand the machinery of loans," said he, blandly, in reply to a question

from the marchioness. "I tried to when I was Chancellor of the Exchequer, but I was so busy just then writing my book on the Theory of Taxation that I really hadn't time."

And he looked round the dinner-table, his mouth slightly open in a languid smile, and his eye-glasses slipping down the ridge of his effective nose.

Most of the company laughed, to indicate that Doncastle's sallies of pure humour were incomparable.

"No. I assure you I'm perfectly serious," insisted the Prime Minister, still smiling. "I never joke."

He had not noticed the dark flash of a scowl on Crampiron's face, nor that Norah was making pacificatory gestures to her betrothed.

But the diarists had noticed these phenomena. And they hugged themselves.

"Perhaps," said Sir Louis Bartram, with a naughty smile, "I may be allowed to refer your lordship for information about the machinery of loans to a popular explanation in this morning's *Daily Record*."

"I never read the newspapers," Doncastle replied. "I get my news from the tape-machine at the Turf Club."

"I wasn't aware that you were interested in sport," said Millicent Courlander.

"I'm not," said Doncastle, hastily. "I go to the club merely in search of the non-intellectual, by way of change. The mischief is that my cousin Somer-

setshire goes there for the same reason, and when we meet the consequences are disastrous. However, I will order your *Record*, Sir Louis."

"Not mine," said Sir Louis. "The great public's."

"It isn't quite nice of you to put Doncastle on to the *Record*, Bertram," said Parculier, the lawyer, "having regard to its leading article."

"Why?" The query came from the Prime Minister.

The lawyer glanced an instant at Courlander, and then answered: "Well, they accuse the Cabinet of helping the German negotiations; in fact, of trying to bring about a European war in order to save their own necks."

"Do they?" said Lord Doncastle. "How rude of them! But how ingenious! I had no idea that newspapers were so ingenious. Besides, it's true, you know." He laughed, and gazed about him with lazy calm.

"You *want* war?" exclaimed Maurice, half-springing from his chair in angry protest.

It was the first volcano in eruption, and it sent a thrill round the table.

"Sonnie!" murmured Carl Courlander, soothingly. He had meant his dinner-party to be a triumph, a proof that Carl Courlander's dinner-parties could rise superior to no matter what circumstances. But he had not expected to find a social delinquent in his own son.

"Why not?" asked Doncastle.

"Because war is barbaric and cruel," said Maurice, with indignation that was generous but rude.

Norah Crampiron glanced at him with eager eyes, half-applauding, half-blaming him.

"So is peace," Doncastle drawled.

The brilliance of this epigram dazzled its author for an instant.

"Moreover," he continued, seriously, "supposing we fell! What a calamity for the nation!"

"I thought your lordship never joked," Abraham Crampiron put in, with sudden and startling brutality.

It was the bursting of the second volcano. Crampiron's voice was naturally rasping. Any other man at the table might have made that speech and inflicted no wound; for, if it was cruel it was at any rate humorous. But not Abraham Crampiron! The instinctive ebullition of his forthright and ruthless temperament shocked the company, used to the manners of diplomacy. And every one remembered that he had come out of South Africa, and that his origin was unknown. Norah reddened.

"But I'm not joking," said Doncastle, genuinely pained. His confidence in the absolute indispensability of himself was the sublimest of his qualities. "As regards foreign affairs there is only one party worthy of the name, and that is ours. It has always been so. Let our opponents get into office and in less than a week the country might be involved in a war on its own account! Think of that!"

His appealing eyes, wistful at moments, demanded confirmation.

"Fanciful?" cried Crampiron, succinctly, and savagely. "Anyhow, your opponents will soon have a chance of trying what they can do."

He laughed self-consciously.

"May I have a cigarette afterwards, dear host?" asked the Marchioness of Herm. "Or doesn't one smoke in the statue?"

She was displaying her tactfulness. The whole table felt that she was displaying her tactfulness. Abraham Crampiron felt it in particular. And he hated all his companions because he could not behave as smoothly and delicately as they behaved, because he was of a different world, and the difference would always show. He hated their politeness, and their fine taste, and their cursed tact, and their traditions. He knew that while they feared him they despised him; and he scorned them for despising him.

The marchioness's diversion succeeded in its object. The volcanoes, intimidated by their own fire and smoke, subsided. The talk changed to a chatter of trifles. After all, the outbreak had been nothing—an affair of a moment, dramatic, nourishing food for diarists; but of no importance, and rather agreeable in its piquancy now that it was over. (So the guests endeavoured to persuade themselves.)

The dinner came to an end. The servants cleared the long table of everything except blossoms, sweets,

coffee, and liqueurs, and the guests remained, as at a public banquet. Lady Mary began to play patience, as usual. Lord Doncastle and Millicent helped her to cheat herself towards the ends of the games. Maurice and Norah were looking out of the window. Emile Berger had been caught between the peeress and the German prince and was being crushed. A group of men, including Crampiron and the lawyer, gossiped amid cigar-smoke at a corner of the table. It was all very informal, as Courlander had meant that it should be. It was also, at last, resuming the gaiety which he had meant it to maintain throughout. But at the bottom of every heart, save possibly that of Lady Mary, was a secret preoccupation. Crampiron's final remark to the company at large could have only one meaning. His syndicate, in concert with the French government, must have worsted its rivals in the negotiations. The Sultan must have definitely accepted their terms. There would be no war and nothing could save the Doncastle ministry.

Had it actually occurred, this fantastic, incredible dinner? Was it possible that up there in the bosom of the statue, high over the elms, amid flowers and pretty frocks, and the glinting of crystal in the bright light, and the pale blue curving wreaths of ascending smoke; while the Premier made theoretic love to the tall and accomplished Millicent Courlander; while the progeny of the prodigious competing money-lenders stood close to each other and did not

hide that passion which had forced the *fiancée's* father to consent to a union; while the German prince exchanged amiable banalities about art with France in the shape of Emile Berger, under the marchioness's beaming smile; while experienced beauties, dowagers and other professional people summed up the universe as though it were the London season—was it really possible that in all this was somewhere concealed, ripe and waiting, the fate of France, Germany, England, and perhaps of the civilised world? Was it possible that, on such a night in such an environment, the incurable Doncastle, who had stepped to the Premiership from the Exchequer, should confess that he did not understand the machinery of loans?

How well Lord Doncastle and Carl Courlander took it! History was being made at their expense; and yet their *sang-froid* remained intact! Nothing escaped the observation of the diarists.

And then of a sudden Lady Mary noticed that the prince was alone, neglected—no one to talk to him! The awful spectacle electrified even Lady Mary into activity.

“But what is your dear father thinking of?” she demanded in a whisper of her daughter.

Millicent, followed by Doncastle, rushed into the breach. And Millicent wondered what her father *was* thinking of to allow such a thing to occur. It was unlike him. Then she discovered that her father was not in the room. He had slipped out unperceived; yet five minutes before she had seen him speak-

ing to one of the servants. At that moment he reappeared. He stood at first in the doorway, smiling vaguely. And as he did not move, all eyes gradually fixed themselves on him, and conversation ceased. Then he advanced into the hushed chamber, still smiling. Something was going to happen: every one felt that.

"Friends," said Courlander, in his low, clear voice, resting one hand on the table, "all the world will be told to-morrow, but there is no reason why you should not be told to-night. The negotiations between Berlin and Tangier are successfully concluded."

He bowed to Lord Doncastle.

Crampiron sprang impulsively forward.

"How do you know?" he cried.

Courlander's smile increased in benevolence.

"Ah!" he murmured, with a wave of the hand that might have meant anything.

"You can't possibly know," said Crampiron.  
"There hasn't been time——"

"But I do!"

"Then will there be war?" Maurice demanded, glaring with solemn indignation at his father.

"Of course, sonnie," Courlander answered with gentle placidity, as though he had been saying that it would be Saturday to-morrow.

Silence followed. The guests had the disturbing sensation of being surrounded by more mysteries even than they had suspected. If Crampiron was affright-

ing, Courlander was uncanny. And the lisp of Lord Doncastle, as with fine casualness he resumed a disquisition on the true functions of the flute to the German prince, reassured no one.

They were most of them conscious of a desire to leave the statue at once.

## CHAPTER III

### BEAKBANE ARRIVES

IT was dark in the gardens. But a very faint suffused radiance from the young moon disclosed vaguely the main features of the vast grounds and the terrible immensity of the statue. The stone in the ring of the statue's finger, an opal by day, was transformed by means of a red blind into a ruby at night; and the ruby glowed dully there, high above the tall elms at the summit of the avenue, watching, as it were, the earth with a suspicious and a sinister eye. Warm winds sprang up, rustled an instant in the trees, and died mysteriously away.

Most of the guests were sped. Lord Doncastle, dropping frankly for a space his fine casualness, had had a private interview with Courlander. He had then departed, whirled off by petrol to Dunstable in company with the prince, the marchioness, and numerous others. Lady Mary had retired, exhausted by the sensations of the day. Abraham Crampiron had remained within the statue, and Courlander, having performed the rites of adieu to the rest, had rejoined him there. After a time Crampiron had left, saying that he should walk home, and leaving the car-

riage for his daughter. The lift in the statue had been ascending and descending a good deal.

At the southern margin of the lake, where a white carriage-road ran straight east and west across the gardens, Emile Berger and Millicent Courlander stood side by side, gazing at a globe of yellow that was coming towards them on the water. It marked the progress of a gondola, in which were Maurice Courlander and his affianced.

"It's a long time since Maurice has been in such a mood as that in which he is to-night," said Emile, stepping carefully and correctly in the jungle of English grammar.

"Yes," Millicent agreed. "It came over him suddenly. I'm not surprised."

"Why are you not surprised?"

"Well, you see, Maurice often pretends to be tremendously cynical, but the poor boy is really absurdly warm-hearted. He hates suffering and so he hates the mere idea of a war."

"But war is not a new thing," said Emile. "There have been several wars in the last years."

"It is because he has only to-night imaginatively realised the true significance of dear papa's business," Millicent answered.

"He is shocked?" said Emile.

"Yes. He is carried away by his feelings. He doesn't see that the rate of the world's evolution cannot be hurried, and that all standards of right and wrong are purely relative."

"You have a marvellous comprehension," murmured Emile.

She half-closed her eyes and glanced at him through her eyelashes.

"It's a good thing," she said, "that Norah knows so well how to manage him. Her idea of getting him to take her out in the gondola was sheer genius. Now I should never have thought of that. Here they come! I must say poor dear Maurice has soon learnt the art of being a gondolier. He's very quick in some things."

The boat, with its ball of fire suspended at the prow, shot darkly towards them. On the cushions could be seen the reclining form of Norah, and Maurice, erect behind her, manipulated the single oar, and brought the craft with a sweep to shore. Norah sprang out.

"Good-night, dearest Milly," she whispered, kissing her future sister-in-law. "Maurice will see me home. Thanks so much for a lovely day."

At the same moment the Crampiron landau advanced, with its two black-liveried servants, its two impatient black horses, and its two bright lamps piercing the gloom. The footman jumped down. Norah, having shaken hands with Emile Berger, got in; Maurice, absolutely silent, followed her; the door slammed; the footman leaped to the box; the pawing steeds broke at once into a fast trot, and the whole affair vanished in the distance like a dream under the red orb of the statue.

To Emile, who had the artist's temperament acutely, everything seemed weird that night. What could be more ordinary than a departure in a carriage? Yet it had affected him as a romantic and inexplicable nocturnal episode might have affected him. He was now left alone with Millicent. Millicent was the most enchanting human phenomenon that Emile Berger had ever in his life encountered. She was so utterly unlike a Frenchwoman. She was tall; she had a perfect complexion; she scorned feminine devices; she never tried to attract. She was above all these duplicities by which women carry on the battle of the sexes in Latin countries. She was sincere and candid, and yet how mysterious! She embodied for him the calm, brooding beauty of the heroines of Rossetti and Tennyson. To an Englishman she was a fine specimen of the well-educated English girl; but to Emile she was something exotic and precious, amazingly intellectual, ravishingly strange. Ever since Courlander and she had discovered him making sketches at Villerville, near Trouville, he had dreamt of Millicent. And during his long sojourn at Tudor Hundreds in charge of the exterior of the statue, he had had full opportunity to study her.

He was beginning to be in love with her. At least he was beginning to be jealous of Lord Doncastle.

As they walked to and fro in the soft obscurity of the June night, and talked of the day's doings, the ridiculousness of him, Emile Berger, daring to be

jealous of the Prime Minister of England, came clearly home to him; as also the ridiculousness of him allowing himself to love Millicent! It was not her position and her father's wealth that most gave him pause; it was Millicent. She was in herself so superior to him! *She* had not gone mad about the beauty of the statue! It was indeed impossible to move her to enthusiasm. And she had such disconcerting insight! He felt that she understood him profoundly, that she estimated him at exactly his true value, which was nothing, and that it was useless to try to impose upon her.

Still, all this did not prevent him from continuing to fall deeper and deeper into that abyss which is called love.

Moreover, he had a charming surprise.

"What did Lord Doncastle mean," he asked her, after a long, exciting silence, "when he said that peace was barbaric and cruel like war?"

"Nothing," said Millicent, shortly. "Nothing whatever! It was merely silly. But he cannot resist the temptation to say things like that."

Here she was, criticising Lord Doncastle to him with the most confidential freedom! His heart danced.

"It's a great pity," she added. "Because——"

She did not finish the sentence. Emile wished she had not begun it, for it seemed to imply that after all she had a certain admiration for Lord Doncastle.

Then the Crampiron carriage returned, as it had

gone, with a dizzying rush, and deposited a taciturn Maurice, and vanished once more. And simultaneously the scarlet end of a cigar came from the opposite direction.

"That's papa," said Millicent.

It was. The ruby no longer glowed in the statue.

"Good-night, dad," she cried, but stayed to kiss him. "Good-night, Lord Byron," she threw at Maurice.

Emile, encouraged by her animadversions on Doncastle, boldly walked off with her under the very guns of her relatives, towards the distant lights of the mansion, leaving father and son alone together.

"Well, Maurice," said Courlander, "what with you and what with your prospective father-in-law, I have had a somewhat lively time to-night." He inspected the end of his cigar, and continued: "Of course I regret for your sake that Crampiron has not come off best in our encounter. But then I should equally have regretted for your sake if I had not come off best. You stood to lose in any event. This comes of wanting to marry for love."

"I'm sorry, dad——"

"You needn't apologise, sonnie," Courlander interrupted him, putting a hand on his shoulder. "I know you did your best to control yourself. What surprises me is that Crampiron was so upset. I should have thought that no one knew better than he that business is—nothing but business. Why not keep perfectly calm over it?"

"I didn't mean I was sorry for getting excited at dinner," said Maurice. "Though I am. I meant I was sorry—sorry—well, that you think business is nothing but business. Dad, I must tell you something."

"Not to-night."

"Why not to-night?"

"Because you're not yourself."

"That's just what I am," cried Maurice, actively volcanic once more. "It's only when one's really moved that one is one's self. I must tell you to-night."

Shifting his cigar to the extreme corner of his mouth, Courlander stepped down to the water's edge, drew the prow of the gondola towards him, pressed up the bottom of the Chinese lantern, and blew out its candle.

"I see no reason why that should burn itself away," he murmured. "Well? Where children are concerned I am a fatalist. What is it you must tell me?"

He smiled benignly.

There was in old Courlander a calm and frigid detachment which had often startled Maurice. To-night it frightened him. He saw that, despite their mutual affection, he had never known his father. None had ever known his father. The man was absolutely mysterious. He was mysterious, not merely by his mysterious actions, but with an innate mysteriousness of soul. It was never possible to be quite

sure what thoughts were in his father's mind. He seemed to be always gently preoccupied, withdrawn, secretly meditative. And yet his gift of organisation was amazing. He had announced at breakfast that morning that he would give a dinner in the statue, as though giving a dinner in the air, with only one lift, and no appliances handy, was the simplest trifle. Neither Lady Mary nor Millicent had troubled themselves; they had not even offered a comment. They had been serenely sure that the head of the house would arrange and carry out his dinner in brief intervals snatched from affairs, and that there would be no hitch. And the dinner was very elaborate, and there had been no hitch. The Courlander family might have been dining in the statue for generations, to judge by the smoothness of the domestic machinery.

And here was the enigmatic man, on the night when he had inaugurated his monstrous, inscrutable, and staggering statue, on the night when he had made inevitable a disastrous war — here he was placidly extinguishing candles in Chinese lanterns!

Maurice began feverishly to roll a cigarette.

"Look here, dad," he said. "I'm twenty-eight next month. Up to now I've done all you suggested. Thanks to you I'm pretty specially educated. I've lived in Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg, New York, and Buenos Ayres, and according to your plan I ought to be ready to join you in the business."

"You're going to inform me that, after all, you

don't want to join me in the business." There was a note of mild amusement in the voice.

"Yes," said Maurice, in a low and gloomy tone. His father was certainly astounding. "You don't appear to care much, dad."

"I care a great deal, my boy," said Courlander. "But the chief thing that I care for is your happiness. Besides, it would have been too much to hope for that an only son who had spent ten years in preparing to go into an absolutely first-class business should ultimately go into that business. That would have been ideal. And as I never expect the ideal, I have always been prepared for a disappointment. What do you mean to do instead?"

"You're awfully decent over it," the son exclaimed, with an impulsive gesture of tenderness.

"I'm merely sensible," said the father, extremely quiet. "What do you mean to do instead?"

"I haven't decided. I should like to—to consult you."

"And when did you decide to throw away all the work of the last ten years?"

"I've been thinking about it a lot—ever since it dawned on me what the success of a business like yours meant to the world. Dad," he pleaded suddenly, with passionate earnestness, "you can stop this war. Stop it."

"Maurice, you are guilty of rudeness."

"Rudeness?"

"Yes. You assume that all these facile humani-

tarian considerations which have occurred to you in the space of a few weeks have not occurred to me in the space of forty years. You assume that you alone have a proper standard of morality. Is that polite? My child, you are only a child, I perceive. You think yourself educated. You aren't, in spite of all our trouble. For you don't understand life. A thousand years hence, perhaps a hundred years hence, war will be barbaric. But to-day it is part of the scheme of things, an instrument of progress. And what harm does it do? A hundred thousand men killed! Two hundred thousand widows and orphans! What of that? It's nothing in the sum of human suffering. And let me tell you that of all instruments of progress, suffering is the greatest. As for the dead men, Nature will soon replace them. Trust her! . . . Besides, I've got nothing whatever to do with the war. The motives of my clients are not my affair."

The placid, cheerful tone in which his father envisaged a wholesale destruction of human life dumbfounded Maurice.

"How not your affair?" he demanded roughly, at length.

"Suppose I was a butcher, and a man came to me to buy a beefsteak, and I said to him, 'No, I won't sell you a beefsteak, because it will give you physical strength, and you are in the habit of beating your wife.' Should I, or should I not, be an ass?"

"You're shifting your ground now, dad."

"I'm simply giving another argument. People come to me to buy money on credit. I sell it to them. I'm not a censor of morals."

"War is an infamy," Maurice retorted in a hard, angry voice. "And you *are* a butcher. You admit that when people have lived a little longer it will be regarded as a barbarism. You could do something to kill war. You could stop one war—you could stop what will be the greatest war of modern times. And you won't. You are making a profit out of it!"

"My dear Maurice, I pardon you. That kind of oratorical trick has no effect on me at all. It doesn't even irritate me. Wait till you're older. You'll see the error of your ways."

Maurice shook his head.

"Then this infamy is——"

"Call it just a war, my boy," the father interrupted gently.

"This war is bound to come to pass?"

"I can only see one contingency that might prevent it."

"What is that?"

Courlander laughed.

"If I were to die within the next day or two, you'd be the head of the house. You'd probably, in your present state, be silly enough to cancel the contracts, and before my friends could rearrange things, Crampiron would do the trick for *his* people—see?"

Maurice threw his half-consumed cigarette into the lake.

"Father!" he almost moaned. "I can't understand you!"

"I never imagined that you could," returned Carl Courlander, suavely. "But one day you will, I hope."

"What's that noise?" Maurice demanded in an apprehensive tone.

Both men listened intently.

"How nervous you are, boy!" said Courlander.  
"Sounds like a motor-car."

"It's coming this way!"

"Yes."

"It's in the grounds."

"Evidently."

"But how did it get through the east gates?"

"We may be sure it didn't leap them," said Courlander.

A running fire of explosions was now heard, growing louder and louder, startling the pensive night with a sharp and violent uproar. Assuredly it was a motor-car, and a very large car, with the silencer off. The noise became deafening; and then, rushing to the road, the Courlanders saw the blinding acetylene eyes of a forty h.p. machine which was approaching like a great beast, cautiously, slowly, and menacingly.

"Hullo there!" cried Maurice. "What the——"

"It's Beakbane in the Mercedes," Courlander called out. "Beakbane, a little less fuss, if you please."

A pair of goggles peered over the side of the car;

and the great beast panted itself reluctantly to a standstill; and there was a sudden surprising silence. But the eyes of the animal continued to shoot long gleams down the surface of the roadway, making each little stone cast a shadow.

"Is it you, sir? I beg pardon. Good-evening, Mr. Maurice."

"Evening, Beakbane." Maurice's greeting was somewhat less than effusive.

"Why did you take the silencer off?" Courlander inquired.

"Speed, sir. I've come down in forty minutes."

"And what have you come for?"

The chauffeur, who carried no passengers, glanced an instant at Maurice, and then said: "I wanted to see you, sir. I came as quickly as I could, so as to catch you before you had gone to bed."

Courlander also glanced at his son.

"Very well," he said calmly. "Bring the car along to the house. But be so good as to restore the silencer to its natural functions first."

"Certainly, sir."

"I'm going to bed," said Maurice, abruptly. "Good-night, dad. Night, Beakbane."

And with his hands more deeply in his pockets than was absolutely necessary, Maurice walked away, and disappeared into the obscurity of the path which, at right-angles to the road, bordered the main arm of the lake.

"I'll go up to the house with you in the car," said

Courlander to Beakbane, but gazing the while after his son, "if you can promise not to split my ears."

Ten minutes later the pair were in Courlander's study, an immense apartment on the first floor, fronting south and overlooking the lake, the avenue, and the statue. The room was decorated in the severest possible manner, in the Empire style. But on the walls were a Velasquez, a Corot, and a Delacroix; on the two consoles in the spaces between the three windows were two vases in *rouge flambe* which were not priceless, but which were worth two thousand pounds apiece; and the vast desk, with its bronze claws, had belonged to the most distinguished of all connoisseurs in furniture, the famous Etienne Derval.

Slade Beakbane shed a too ostentatious fur coat and appeared in a costume which clashed horribly with the fine taste of the room. The man was in more or less conventional morning dress, but obviously he was an extremist in the matter of fancy braided waistcoats and salient neckties.

Tall and thin, he had strikingly Jewish features. His eyes were very large. He was a bachelor, aged forty. He had begun at the beginning in the firm of Courlander, and for the past ten years had been Carl's confidential clerk. The City understood his salary to be two thousand a year. Naturally he was celebrated in the City, and the City attributed to him extraordinary gifts for chicane and for the mastery of detail. Except in the presence of his master he was a great and formidable person. But with Carl

he always felt himself to be the office boy of a quarter of a century earlier. This annoyed him, but he could not change it.

"Sit down, Beakbane," said Carl. "What's the matter?"

"I met Effingham at the club to-night."

"Effingham?"

"Yes, sir. Junior partner in Helmores."

"Well?"

"Helmores want to back out of the loan."

"What's their share? Two, isn't it?" (He meant millions.)

"Yes, sir."

"He didn't tell you they want to back out, I suppose."

"No, sir. But he hinted as much."

"What club?"

"Constitutional, sir."

"Is he often there?"

"Scarcely ever."

"Do you dine there frequently?"

"Every night, sir," said Beakbane, pained. Nothing wounded his vanity more than Carl's obstinate ignorance as to what he did when he was off duty.

"Then Effingham may have come there on purpose to meet you?"

"Probably, sir."

"Who's been getting at Helmores?"

"There are all sorts of rumours, as you know, sir."

Courlander, instead of replying, went to the cigar

cabinet to the right of the fireplace, chose a long cigar, cut it with much care, and lighted it.

"It surely can't be Crampiron!" said he, gazing at Beakbane.

"I——"

"Beakbane, what's wrong with you to-night?" Carl questioned him suddenly.

The clerk paused.

"Frankly, sir," he said, "I'm worried—about this."

"You needn't be," said Carl. "Take down this letter. Here's a piece of paper."

Beakbane hated to take down letters. His employer had several stenographers for such humble tasks. But Beakbane had written shorthand in his youth, and he could not lose the acquirement, of which Courlander made use from time to time. Therefore Beakbane pulled out a pencil, and poised it at attention.

"'My dear Helmore,'" Courlander dictated. "'The X. Y. Z. affair is arranged, on terms slightly better than the minimum decided at our meeting on Thursday. But don't consider yourself bound. I have other offers. Only I would like a definite answer within two hours. Believe me, yours sincerely.' That will bring him to the point, I imagine. Mark it private."

"Arranged!" gasped Slade Beakbane.

"Certainly," Carl Courlander replied frigidly.

"You've received the first——?" He stopped.

"Didn't I tell you I should, man? That is to say,

I fully expected to receive it, and I was not disappointed."

"To-night, sir?"

"To-night."

"I thought it could not be before to-morrow, sir."

"You were wrong, my lad."

"Then it's a success, sir?"

"It is a triumph!" said Courlander. "Write out the letter, and I'll sign it. And see that Helmore has it before eleven to-morrow. You and I will go up to town together in the Mercedes at nine precisely in the morning. But not without the silencer."

There was a pause.

"I should prefer to return to-night, sir," Beakbane mumbled uneasily. "I——"

"As you wish," said Courlander, briefly. "But it's considerably past midnight."

The confidential clerk copied the letter, and Courlander examined it before signing, and gave a swift glance at his minion.

"Beakbane," the financier exclaimed, "I've asked you already. I ask you again. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Then why do you spell meeting m-e-a-t? You have dismissed guileless youths for less than that! No, don't trouble to re-copy it. I'll put it right."

Beakbane said nothing; but rose hastily to resume his overcoat.

"Thanks for coming," were Courlander's words of

adieu to Beakbane, at the north door of the house.  
“It was just as well.”

“So I thought, sir,” said Beakbane, apparently cheered, and pulled the starting-lever. “Good-night, sir.”

The red rear-light of the Mercedes receded and disappeared, and the sound of the engine grew fainter and fainter till it was imperceptible.

“Tomkins,” Courlander addressed the solitary footman on duty in the porch. “Telephone to the East Lodge to open the gates for Mr. Beakbane. Then you can go to bed. I will lock the doors.”

The lackey bowed.

Courlander strolled round the vast building, finishing his cigar. Arrived at the south side he looked up at the façade. It was dark, save for Berger’s window at the west corner of the second floor.

“I wager those two boys are sitting up talking,” he murmured, and continued his circuit.

He entered the house, locked and bolted its grandiose portals, turned out all the lights except one, which burnt all night, got into the lift, and ascended to the second floor. The long deserted corridor was dimly illuminated at either extremity. Nothing could be heard in the immense interior of the building. He turned to the left, knocked softly at the endmost door, and opened it a few inches.

“Now, you boys,” he said gaily. “It’s one o’clock. Bed!”

That was his paternal, good-humoured way.

"Come in, Mr. Courlander," said a voice.

He obeyed.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed. "Where's Maurice?"

Emile Berger, alone and involved in the folds of a radiant dressing-jacket, was sitting on a Chippendale table, idly dangling his legs.

"He came in a few minutes since," Berger replied, slipping off the table. "Then he went out again. I'm waiting for him."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing at all?"

"Not a word."

"Well, it's time you were both in bed. Good-night."

And Carl Courlander departed.

Emile, tired of waiting for Maurice's return, disengaged himself reluctantly from the pearl of a dressing-jacket, and, assuming other garments not less resplendent, got into bed. But, disturbed by visions now hopeful, now despairing, in which Millicent was the central figure, he did not sleep. He did not even attempt to sleep. Like many people in the earlier stages of love, he was apt to regard sleep as a waste of time which could more profitably be devoted to visions. And so the brief summer night passed over the dreaming silence of Tudor Hundreds and was gone. And at dawn Emile arose and bathed and dressed, and descended cautiously through the house, so vast and still, into the early, virginal freshness of

the gardens which he had helped to plan. And he gazed at the distant wonder of the statue, his creation, and said to himself that it was good. Ultimately his restlessness brought him to the foot of the statue.

On the plinth, a man in evening dress (minus the necktie) was lying with closed eyes in front of the disguised door: a poor little dwarfed figure under the mighty shadow of the statue. Round the upper stud of his shirt-front spread a nearly mathematical circle of crimson.

For the amorous visionary it was indeed a too surprising and violent encounter with the real.

## CHAPTER IV.

MAURICE

**E**MILE gazed at the prone figure an instant only and then, without further examination of any kind, ran away fast towards the house. He was a Frenchman, and though Frenchmen have a thousand fine qualities, the quality of presence of mind in the first moments of a crisis is not one of them. And this was a crisis. It was a crisis of the greatest magnitude.

After seven minutes of hard running, he arrived at the house, which he had quitted by the great glass doors on the terrace. He re-entered it, breathless, by the same doors, and stood paralysed for a few seconds by excitement and alarm, in the vast hall. Two of Lady Mary's Japanese spaniels had employed their leisure in masticating the corners of a Persian rug late on the previous evening, and the rug lay there creased and out of place, and the absence of dust over a narrow oblong of the marble floor showed where the rug ought to have been. Such things Emile mechanically observed. The chiming-clock at the other extremity of the hall performed a melody of Mozart, played the quarters, and struck five, sounding as it were a menace and a strange foreboding in

the perfect stillness; the final silvery stroke vibrated a long time in the air.

Outside, the sun shone brightly upon the dewy earth. But nevertheless it was the hour of deepest sleep. The twenty or thirty servants were asleep in their own wing. The gardeners and other workmen were asleep over the distant garage. Lady Mary and Millicent and their maids were asleep. Maurice was no doubt asleep. Emile listened intently. Not a sound reached him in the enormous mansion. He looked through the door. The immense expanses of garden and lake were utterly deserted. The statue glittered superbly in the sunlight over the distant converging lines of elms.

Nothing seemed to live except Emile. None of the sleepers dreamed of what attended their wakening. Emile alone knew, and Emile had to tell.

It was fantastic, impossible.

Suddenly nerving himself, he hurried to the lift. It was up at the second floor where Carl Courlander had left it four hours ago. By pushing a button Emile might have brought it down. But he could not wait. He ran up the wide and velvet-floored staircase, on which statues by Rodin, Barye, and Gilbert occupied every corner, and violently invaded the room of Maurice.

Maurice was lying, wide awake, on his back, his hands clasped under his head. He started, nervously and violently lifting his head with his hands. Then he sank back.

"What's up now?" he demanded coolly. "Anybody ill?" There was something almost resentful in his voice.

"No! Yes! It's your father, *mon pauvre ami!* At the statue!"

"At the statue? How at the statue!" He looked at a clock on the mantelpiece. "Hasn't he been to bed?"

Emile shook his head. "You must come. Now."

"I will," said Maurice, sitting up. "Did he tell you to fetch me?"

"No."

Maurice asked no more questions. He put two garments over his pyjamas, pushed his feet into a pair of slippers, and seized a cap. It was done in ten seconds.

"I'm ready," he said coldly.

Englishmen were amazing creatures, Emile thought. When you expected them to be calm they lost control of themselves; and when you expected them to display emotional disturbance, they displayed nothing but the most astounding phlegm.

Maurice stopped at the door of the bedroom.

"What were you doing out there so early?" he asked.

"I couldn't sleep," said Emile. "So I went out."

"H'm!" was Maurice's cold comment. "I couldn't sleep either."

They rushed forth. There was no other conversation. Emile feared to tell what he had seen, and

Maurice, most singularly, did not inquire. They trotted side by side, down the gardens, and along by the lake. And as they progressed, the statue loomed larger and larger. They panted up the incline of the avenue of elms. Skirting the path was the temporary electric wire by means of which Lady Mary had unveiled the statue. At last they were within the shadow of the statue, and the statue's right arm stretched its sword horizontally over them, far above the tree-tops.

And on the great granite plinth, itself a square of fifty feet, reposed the insignificant, trifling, twisted, human figure whose will had caused the creation of the statue.

Maurice sprang up the steps of the plinth, ran towards the body, then halted a few feet away from it.

"He's dead!" he cried to Emile instantly. "Look at the jaw—how it's fallen!"

He continued to stare fixedly at the corpse, with its tragically ridiculous attire of ceremony. A grey wide-awake, which Carl Courlander often wore at night when taking the air, lay close at hand.

"Dead?" murmured Emile.

"Can't you see he's been murdered?" Maurice almost shouted. He knelt suddenly by the corpse, touched the forehead, and drew away with a shudder, without, however, rising from his knees.

"Stabbed!" said Emile.

"My God!" Maurice cried. A single terrible sob shook him.

"Shall I telephone for a doctor?" Emile asked.

Maurice turned on him savagely, his dark unbrushed hair falling over his forehead into his eyes. "What the devil's the good of a doctor?" he demanded with the intense irritation of wrought nerves. "Telephone for the police, more like."

Then he sighed, glanced at Emile appealingly, and stood up, and retreated to the edge of the plinth.

Emile looked about, utterly perplexed and embarrassed, made futile and helpless by the event. Except the corpse itself there was not the slightest sign of the unusual. No footmarks! No trace of any kind! He watched Maurice, who had knelt again by the corpse, only to rise and walk away. Emile tried to open the door of the statue. It was locked.

And gradually, as he looked, horrified, first at the corpse, and then at Maurice Courlander, the one quiet in the everlasting stillness, the other an incomprehensible mixture of calm and tumult, on the sun-reflecting granite beneath the monstrous statue—gradually the sense of unique and appalling disaster took possession of Emile. At first he had scarcely been able to believe. He had said to himself: "It is impossible that *I* should have found this. It is impossible that this should have happened to *my* friends. It is impossible that such a fate should have been waiting for exactly Carl Courlander!" But so it was. And the realisation of the fact, if slow, was overwhelming.

An idea struck him sharply, and he examined the corpse with new attention.

"Maurice," he whispered. Young Courlander made no sign. "Maurice!"

"Well?" The tone was even and frigid.

"Come here."

Maurice approached a few steps.

"What is it?"

"I am sure the right arm was not like this when I left it. It was less under the body. You cannot see the hand at all now. But I'm sure I saw it before, because I remember the ring on it."

"But even if he had been alive when you first found him, he would not have put his hand *under* his body!" Maurice seemed to grumble, after a strange pause.

"No!"

"Then while you were away at the house fetching me, some one must have come—and disturbed him. Some one must have been hiding. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"It's unthinkable, man!" Maurice cried loudly.

"Why?"

"I don't know," Maurice lamely surrendered. "Did you look—the other side of the statue?"

"No. I simply ran to fetch you."

"Well, go and see. Quick!" The command was urgent, irritated.

Emile obeyed, making the circuit of the statue.

Nobody! Nothing! He gazed in every direction. No sign, no clue, no hint.

When he returned, Maurice was staring down the avenue of elms.

"Who's that?" he questioned.

Some one was coming along the avenue.

"It is your mother," said Emile.

"Mother! What can she——" Maurice glanced in alarm at Emile. "She must be stopped!" he exclaimed. "She must be stopped! She mustn't see this. Go and stop her."

"I?"

"Yes, yes! Go and stop her. I'll stay here."

Emile submissively hurried off.

It was a remarkable sight to see this middle-aged and luxuriously-tended woman, whose every daily habit was slothful, bland, and changelessly regular, hastening across the grounds over wet grass at five o'clock in the morning. Emile wondered what strange complication had happened within the house to arouse her at such an hour from the amiable torpor in which she passed her existence.

She did not give him time to speak first.

"Emile," she called out, while they were yet thirty yards apart, "have you seen my husband?" With one plump hand she was holding up the folds of a beautiful but fragile peignoir. Despite her years she made an extraordinarily graceful picture of pathos as she halted, in an attitude of helpless, child-like appeal, waiting for Emile's reply.

"Madame," he said, in just the right tone, "that is precisely what I was going to ask you. When did you see Mr. Courlander? Why are you here so early?"

"Oh!" she cried, "I heard such a flying up and down stairs. It woke me. I got out of bed to tell my husband. You know, I always get up and tell him when I can't sleep." (In that naïve confession was a hint of all that Carl had been to her.) "And he wasn't in his room. Then I looked out of the window and I saw you and Maurice running down the garden. I rang my bell, but no one answered. I was so frightened I came after you. What are you doing out here? I do wish——"

"Pardon me, madame, when did you last see Mr. Courlander?"

He used the somewhat formal manner which he invariably adopted to his hostess, and which, indeed, she somehow inspired in most persons.

"I saw him asleep in bed at half-past one this morning," said Lady Mary.

"Asleep in bed?"

"Yes."

"Undressed?"

"Why, yes! He had evidently told Curtis not to stay up for him, because his clothes were all about the room."

"What clothes, madame?"

"His dress-clothes, of course."

"You are sure, madame, that this was last night? Was it not the night before last?"

"You know perfectly well, Emile, that the night before last my poor Carl spent in town. I tell you I saw him in bed last night—I mean this morning. Emile, Emile, what is it? What has happened?"

"Something must have happened," Emile temporised.

She sank to the ground without the slightest warning, and hid her face.

"I know he's dead!" she exclaimed, patting her face with a little handkerchief. "I know he's lying dead up at the statue. Why doesn't Maurice come to me?"

"But, madame——"

"Yes, mother," said a low voice behind them, "he is dead." It was Maurice. He raised her gently and supported her; and they exchanged eyes.

"He's been murdered," she whispered.

Maurice drew back. "How did you know?" he queried in a brief gust of excitement.

"I didn't know, I guessed."

"But you must have had some——"

She shook her head. "I just guessed." She was gently weeping. "Nothing that your father could do or that could happen to him would ever surprise me. I finished being surprised twenty years ago. I must go to him."

Maurice, who had been kicking at the grass with his heel, seized her hand again firmly.

"No, mother," he said in a trembling voice. "You must go back to the house to Millicent."

"Maurice!" she protested.

"Yes, please," he said, authoritatively. "Emile, will you go up there and keep watch?"

Emile went instantly.

"I won't let you leave me!" Lady Mary sobbed.

"I'm not going to leave you," said Maurice. "I will take you. Come!"

He led her in the direction of the house.

As they walked side by side, she told him, in little patches of rapid talk, interrupted by tears, what she had told Emile. He made no comment.

"I thought I heard that new bell of your father's about two o'clock," she said.

"What new bell?" Maurice questioned.

"I don't know. A bell he has been having fixed in his bedroom."

"We shall want men from Scotland Yard, I suppose," he muttered.

Arrived at the house, which was still absolutely silent in sleep, he said brusquely to his mother—

"Go yourself to Millicent and tell her."

"And you? What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to father's bedroom."

They went up in the lift together.

In Carl's chamber, of which the blinds were drawn, and would now remain drawn, the presence of the dead man seemed to be immanent. It was as if his spirit permeated it. The room was perfectly in order, save for a white necktie that lay on a chair. In its costly and large simplicity it was the very expres-

sion of Carl Courlander. By the bedside were the electric button by which he rang for Curtis, his man, and the switch for the reading-light. A copy of "Marcus Aurelius" was open, face downwards, on the pillow. On the marble top of a chest of drawers in a corner lay a coil of wire and a bell; also a box. But there was no attachment; the bell was not fastened to the wire nor the wire to the wall. Lady Mary must have been deceived in fancying that she heard ringing in the room. Death had evidently cut short Carl's intentions with regard to that bell.

What was the bell meant to do? Was it part of an uncompleted communication with the statue? No other conjecture could present itself, for the statue loomed over the tragedy in a sense more than physical. Why did the statue exist? That enigma which had agitated every breast hung like a cloud in the poignant atmosphere of the room. The one being who could dissipate it lay dead under the statue itself? The air was full of problems and queries. Carl Courlander had done everything, attended to everything. No one else had had any real duties. The vast organism of Tudor Hundreds had been kept in proper activity by Carl alone. All things were referred to him, who bore the burden so lightly. And the same applied to the house in Hamilton Place, and, of course, in far greater degree, to the business of the firm of Courlander. One single brain there had been. And now that brain was eternally quiet.

And the inheritor of that brain's functions and im-

mense responsibility stood in the bedroom looking at the bed, mysterious, inactive, moody, intensifying by his demeanour the enigma of the situation.

A few hours since, the son had been holding an argument with his father—his father who was so vivacious, and so calm in his vivacity. And now the son was wrapped in contemplation before the bed which the father had quitted, with such strangeness and in such silence, to meet death at the foot of the statue.

Every object in the room seemed to demand: Why at the foot of the statue?

The door communicating with Lady Mary's bed-chamber opened, and Millicent came in. Her face was extremely pale; her eyes were not yet fully awake. But her brain was aroused, and she was entirely collected. She spoke very quietly, very gently.

"Is it true, what mother says?"

He nodded.

As he answered her questions, he could not but admire her profoundly; she was so mistress of herself, so equal to the occasion, so touching in her restrained anguish. But he answered dreamily.

"What shall you do first, Maurice?" she asked him. "I must look after mother. I told her not to come in here."

Her tone now expressed a serene confidence in him, an immense reliance on him as the natural head of the family, a deep anticipatory respect for whatever his decision might be. It seemed to draw him magically from his dream.

"I must have Curtis," he said decisively. "We can't telephone yet; the exchange at Dunstable doesn't open till eight. I shall get Emile to run over to the police-station there on his bicycle, so as to have no fuss in the stables or the garage. He can also bring a doctor to certify. As soon as I can I'll telephone to Scotland Yard and to Beakbane."

"But the——"

"The body? Leave that to Curtis and me."

Then he leaned across the bed and pushed the button which would arouse Curtis. It was his first definite act as head of the family.

## CHAPTER V

### A CURIOUS PHENOMENON

**B**REAKFAST was usually served at nine o'clock precisely at Tudor Hundreds. At nine o'clock precisely Maurice entered the breakfast-room with its famous oval table of inlaid ebony.

The table was bare.

He rang the bell, which was answered not by the butler but by a footman.

“Why is breakfast not ready?”

“If you please, Mr. Maurice——”

“There is no Mr. Maurice here now.” The interruption was curt and cold. “Did Boncini imagine that no one was going to eat to-day? Let the meal be ready in half an hour exactly. And inform Mr. Berger.”

“Certainly, sir.”

What struck the footman was that the formidable Italian chef, who posed as an artist and had invariably been treated as such, was now summarily described as “Boncini.” Not “Signor Boncini”! Not even “Mr.”! In one minute the kitchens and the servants’ hall hummed to the definite news that the dark-eyed, dark-haired master of the Hundreds was already showing his mettle, and that his father’s deci-

siveness, without his father's suavity, might be expected. The kitchens and the servants' hall recovered magically from the excusable slackness into which they had been thrown by an incredible disaster. And the employer's severity descended from grade to grade, becoming harsher at every step, and resulting finally in the whimpering of scullery-maids. A sad, stout, august figure was to be seen hurrying upstairs immediately afterwards. It was the housekeeper on her way to Maurice's rooms to satisfy herself personally that no fault could be found with their condition should he happen to enter them.

Maurice and Emile Berger breakfasted alone together, eating little of the meal whose perfection proved that Signor Boncini was anxious not to lose a post worth two thousand a year and all found. Lady Mary was prostrate in bed, and Millicent had charge of her. The two young men talked as sparingly as they ate, discussing merely what necessary formal things were arranged, and what remained to be done. Emile, who was much affected by grief, seemed to take his cue, cautiously, from Maurice.

Less than five hours had elapsed since the discovery of the murder, and already an astounding transformation had occurred in Maurice. From a dreamer he had developed into a resolute and effective force. The situation which he had been called upon to meet was trying and complex in the highest degree. But he was meeting it with entire adequacy, by the startlingly sudden exercise of that organising power, that

directive activity, at once broad and minute, which had so strongly characterised his dead father. He had taken command and every one was obeying him—obeying him, moreover, with the alacrity that comes from awe. Emile, his intimate, was not a stranger to this feeling. For not even to Emile had he deigned to be confidential; not even to his capable and self-controlled, tragic-eyed sister! He was a changed man. He had become the sort of person whom acquaintances will discuss in a whisper when his back is turned.

His secretive and brooding demeanour baffled comprehension. In particular he had offered no shadow of a surmise as to the identity of the criminal. The frightful enigma that imposed itself on Tudor Hundreds like a heavy cloud through which all objects were seen distorted and terrifying, seemed not to exist for him. Apparently he was too absorbed in the immediate consequences of the crime to trouble himself with its causes.

The immediate consequences had commenced with the arrival of the police, followed by a local doctor on horseback, and the coroner's officer, about seven o'clock. At eight o'clock, so rapid was the march of things, an order for a post-mortem had been obtained, the inquest arranged for the next day but one, and telegraphic and telephonic messages despatched to Scotland Yard and to Beakbane. Emile had himself taken a note from Maurice to Norah Crampiron. It was during breakfast that the first telegrams, like

the scattered flakes preluding a snow-storm, descended on the house. They came from Scotland Yard, from the cashier of the Bank of England, and from two newspapers. Already the news was afoot in London. By eleven o'clock the storm had burst in full fury, and Maurice had installed himself in his father's study to deal with it. Emile and a clerk from the household accounts office constituted his staff.

The butler, gifted with a slow and distinct manner of speech, was permanently seated in a chair at the telephone.

At noon, half the special reporters of Fleet Street were assaulting the portals of Tudor Hundreds. At half-past twelve this army was outside the domains, exterminated by administrative order of Maurice.

At one o'clock a stream of other callers set in, direct by train from London: clerks and principals from the City, envoys from politicians, a special messenger from a royal palace. Then came the first inquisitive cables from the chancelleries and the bourses of the continent. Carl Courlander was dead!

Maurice battled with the storm of telegrams and the ever-rising flood of callers until three o'clock, when, returning to the study after an interview with two stockbroking friends of his father in the drawing-room, he impetuously exclaimed to Emile—

“I’m going to stop this.”

And he pushed twice at an electric button on his desk.

An undersized Chinaman, dressed in a dark blue

robe, with a long black pigtail, came smoothly and silently into the room. This was the body-servant of the late Carl. The death of his master, however, had produced no visible effect on that superb Oriental nonchalance. The outwardly humble valet attained with supreme perfection what Lord Doncastle had spent a lifetime in striving for—that is to say, an absolute indifference. When informed by Maurice at early morning of Carl's murder, he had not even lifted those slanting eyebrows of his. Yet more than once he had proved his sincere attachment to Carl. The late financier had found him starving, with miraculous bland resignation, in the precincts of the Paris Exhibition of 1900; had taken a fancy to him, and had added him to the innumerable Courlander retinue, in which he had soon achieved an important position. He was faithful, discreet, efficient, and mysterious—qualities which had naturally endeared him to Carl. In the whole tenebrous affair of the murder, perhaps nothing had astonished Maurice more than that Curtis (he was named Curtis because for thirty years all Carl's valets had been named Curtis—after the first one) could throw no light whatsoever on the darkness.

"Curtis," said Maurice, swinging round on his pivoted chair, "how many people are still waiting to see me?"

"Seven, sir," Curtis responded with his exotic accent.

"I will see none of them."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell Otway to tell them."

"Yes, sir."

"I will see no more visitors to-day except Mr. Beakbane, Mr. Crampiron and Miss Crampiron, the doctor, and the men from Scotland Yard. Understand—nobody!"

"Yes, sir."

Curtis left the room with the strange impassivity of a god walking out of a temple, his arms crossed in his wide, hanging sleeves.

The instructions seemed simple and complete; but they proved to be futile. There were men in the domain who meant to see Maurice and who did see him, invading even the fastness of the study. A viscount who nourished his distinguished blood on the directors' fees of seventeen public companies, and who knew the geography of the house, deliberately engaged the armies of Otway, the butler, and after beating them off with great loss, fled with his white moustaches and white gaiters to the study and entered it without knocking.

Maurice, as dangerous as an explosive, summoned Curtis.

"Show out this gentleman," he said to Curtis, "and then come back to me."

The showing out of the directorial viscount was a historic scene (not, however, recorded in the viscount's published memoirs "Town and City from 1855 to 1905").

"Yes, sir," said Curtis, returning.

"Order all the lodge-gates to be closed to everybody except the people I mentioned and the telegraph boys."

"Yes, sir."

"And then stand outside this door."

"Yes, sir."

Thenceforward Maurice attended to business undisturbed. The Chinaman stood moveless in the centre of the long corridor, and received telegrams, telephone messages, and letters. And the hours passed, and Beakbane did not come, nor any one from Scotland Yard, nor either of the Crampirons. And a servant brought tea for Maurice and Emile and the clerk. And more hours passed. And Maurice and Emile went down to dinner, and a servant brought the clerk's dinner; and then Maurice and Emile came back. The doctor happened to meet Maurice on the stairs. He reported that the autopsy was finished and that Carl Courlander had died from injury to the tricuspid valve of the heart, given by some small sharp instrument. And Curtis remained always in the corridor, accepting and delivering every manner of communication. Occasionally he paced meditatively to and fro in the corridor. At dusk he switched on the light.

It was shortly after this that an officious and splendid young man, accompanied by one of the Courlander servants in a state of agitation, appeared at the end of the corridor and rapidly approached

Curtis. This youth had the air of a nincompoop, but he had proved that he was not exactly a nincompoop by getting past the lodge-gates and as far as Curtis.

He personally extended a card to Curtis, and Curtis perused on the card the words: "The Earl of Fenton."

"I must see Mr. Courlander," said the visitor, commandingly.

"No, sir," Curtis gravely replied.

There was a pause.

"But I must," said the visitor, persuasively.

"No, sir," Curtis gravely repeated.

Another pause, in which the visitor glanced as if for moral aid at the other servant—aid not rendered.

"But don't you know I'm private secretary to Lord Doncastle, the Prime Minister?" said the visitor, furiously. "I *must* see Mr. Courlander. I've come specially. It's of the highest importance."

"No, sir," Curtis gravely iterated.

The earl rapidly considered within himself what was the most precious thing in the world, and decided that it was his dignity. He therefore departed, too proud to ask that a note should be sent in to Maurice.

Maurice was unaware of such episodes. He sat now, as he sat during the major part of the day, calm and absorbed, at the broad desk in the vast study. Except Curtis, there was not a soul in the house who did not show more grief than Maurice. Two hundred answered telegrams, cables, and letters lay in

piles to his left hand; a hundred and seventy missives still unanswered lay to his right. Emile and the clerk were writing at a table in a corner. A green-shaded electric lamp lighted their labours. Another lamp, similarly shaded, threw a circle of illumination on Maurice's blotting-paper. The rest of the apartment was in gloom. Outside, the last silver of twilight had not faded from the sky. Here in this room was a little centre of human life; another existed in Lady Mary's bedroom, where the chatelaine, under rose-tinted lamps, was watched over by her daughter and a maid; still other centres were in the servants' hall, and at the great north door, where footmen foregathered, and in the stables, and in the garage, and in the conservatories, and in each of the lodges. And within the dim locked bedroom of the late master, shut in a shell on the stripped bed, reposed solitary the dead body of Carl.

And over all still hung the heavy cloud of the enigma, made heavier by the passage of time and by the unexplained and inexplicable absence of persons who ought not to have been absent. Word had come long hours ago that Beakbane and detectives were *en route* from London. Yet they had not arrived, and surely either Norah or her father should at least have sent a message! Yet there was no sign from them. Even the Dunstable police, Maurice was informed, had left. All these phenomena were extremely curious and disconcerting.

A phenomenon still more curious and still more dis-



"I want to see you," he said, depositing the Chinaman on the floor.



concerting occurred a little later. The door of the study opened and Curtis floated into the room dangling by the scruff of the neck in the right hand of a tall, burly, and cheerful individual.

Curtis had been defeated.

"You are Mr. Maurice Courlander," said the individual.

"What do you want?"

"I want to see you," said the individual, puffing, and depositing an unmoved Curtis on the ground.

"Who are you?"

"I will tell you that when we are alone."

"Then you will not tell me at all," said Maurice, icily.

"Stay a moment," said the individual.

He advanced to the desk. Maurice jumped up. Emile also rose, as if to shield the one or to attack the other.

"I merely wish to show you my card—you alone," emphasised the individual. "I have my reasons for showing it to you alone."

Maurice inspected the card.

There was a dramatic silence.

"No one knows who you are?" Maurice questioned.

"No one," said the individual.

"Very well."

Maurice glanced at Berger.

Berger and the clerk, gathering up their papers, vanished. Curtis, with the foreseeing instinct of the Oriental, had preceded them.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE TWO DETECTIVES

“**S**O you are Mr. Solomon Sibthorpe?” said Maurice, eyeing the stranger who had carried in Curtis by the neck.

“At your service,” replied Solomon Sibthorpe, still puffing slightly after the exertion.

And he replied in a bland, cheerful tone such as might have been employed by a West End shopman of superior manners to a customer in search of pink ribbon. There was no sense of tragedy about Solomon Sibthorpe. He was too stout to feel tragedy. His girth, in fact, was enormous. And he had brown whiskers, and full cheeks, and teeth that gleamed in the midst of his smile, and wavy hair. Yet he was never very far distant from tragedy. Famous he could not be called; but he enjoyed a sort of sinister subterranean celebrity. He was more known of than known. His name occurred frequently in the papers, and almost always with the same formula:—“The case is in the hands of Inspector Solomon Sibthorpe of the Criminal Investigation Department.” Nothing but that! Inspector Solomon Sibthorpe never appeared in the case. The public never “saw” him, though, if ever a man could be said

to be visible to the naked eye, Solomon Sibthorpe was that man. He existed in the popular imagination as a long, lean person, with darkly glinting eyes, something between a conjurer and a cuttlefish, who even at school had been sardonic and mysterious, who was dead to all human affections at the age of twenty, whose private address was divulged to none but the Chief Commissioner of Police, who might be observed on rare occasions at the Savoy, talking in low, guarded tones to the chef, and sipping a great wine that was offered only to the finest connoisseurs.

The reality differed somewhat from this vision. In boyhood Sibthorpe had failed for the navy; a little later he had attempted oranges in Florida, and it was only by sheer hazard that he had entered New Scotland Yard. Some detectives may be born; a french-polisher or a maker of glass-eyes may be born. But Sibthorpe was not born a detective. He made himself a detective, and one early success established his reputation. When, at thirty, his girth began to increase the Yard was alarmed. As his girth went on increasing the Yard was scandalised; that girth was contrary to tradition. But as his girth still went on increasing, the Yard laughed, and Sibthorpe, from a scandal, became a joke.

After all, why should a detective not be fat, since the science of detection has long since discarded the infantile dodge of disguise? He was married and lived in Argyll Street, and his wife regarded him as a fat fool. His age was fifty.

Maurice, who corresponded much more nearly than Sibthorpe to the popular notion of a detective, remained standing a moment, mutely regarding the inspector.

"Will you sit down?" he said at length, in a resigned tone.

"Thanks," said Sibthorpe, genially. "At your service," he repeated.

And they both sat down, Maurice at the desk and Sibthorpe in a vast Empire fauteuil which might have been specially designed for him.

"I regret that you were not at my service a little earlier—a good deal earlier," said Maurice, stiffly. "I've been waiting for you all day."

"Yes, I knew you were getting impatient," was Sibthorpe's cheery answer.

"How did you know?"

"I've been here all day," said Sibthorpe.

Maurice started. He would perhaps have paid much to have recalled that start; but he could not even give it the appearance of a voluntary movement; it was a genuine start. One might conceive that hitherto he had looked on Sibthorpe as comic, as a kind of grotesque insult to his intelligence; but that now he felt differently. To learn that this elephant had been about the place all day, his identity unguessed, was assuredly disconcerting, and the fact that no one but a madman would have taken Sibthorpe for a detective, did not make it a bit less so.

There was a brief silence in the room. Maurice

stared down at the circle of light thrown on the desk by the desk-lamp, and Sibthorpe looked over his shoulder, as though he suspected some one's presence, at the circle of light thrown by the other lamp on the table where Berger and the clerk had been working.

"Why didn't you come to me first?" Maurice demanded.

"Common sense," said Sibthorpe.

"Common sense? How?"

"Always best to avoid preconceptions," said Sibthorpe. "I like to think for myself before hearing what other people think."

"But what have you been doing?"

"Examining the field," said Sibthorpe.

"And have you discovered anything?"

"You will know later, Mr. Courlander," said Sibthorpe; and gazed with a steady and invincible smile at the master of Tudor Hundreds.

Maurice was angry; but he was also helpless; he therefore concealed his anger. His estimate of Sibthorpe had changed four times in three minutes. First he had taken him for a rude, clumsy, and athletic clown, gifted with a certain ingenuity for compassing his own ends. Then his verdict had agreed with Mrs. Sibthorpe's. Then he had been impressed and almost intimidated. Lastly he had half come round again to Mrs. Sibthorpe, and this because the detective obviously took a naïve pleasure in adopting a theatrical pose. The detective was clearly an egotist of an advanced kind, and saw himself invariably as

the centre of the picture. Thus he had not offered a word of respectful sympathy for Maurice. For him the murder of Carl Courlander was not an occasion of profound grief for Carl's family; it was an opportunity for Carl's family to witness the cleverness of Solomon Sibthorpe.

"Having examined the field," said Maurice, drily, "what is your next move?"

"My next move is to examine you."

"Examine me then." He swung his chair round on its pivot and faced Sibthorpe with a gesture that resembled hostility.

"Whom do you suspect?" Sibthorpe demanded with gay amiableness.

"I suspect no one."

"H'm!" murmured Sibthorpe gently, letting his hands flirt with each other over the lowest button of his waistcoat. "Not even Beakbane?" Like many fat men, he had a quiet, pleasant voice.

"If Beakbane had any designs on my father's life, why should he have come down openly last night in a motor-car? I suppose you know he did come?"

"Yes, I know," replied Sibthorpe. "But suppose he didn't mean to come down openly?"

"Didn't mean to! But he came."

"Exactly. But supposing that he had meant to come down secretly by night, and some one had recognised him, some one who would be certain to chatter afterwards? He would then have to make the best of a bad job, and he would show himself boldly, hop-

ing that his very boldness would disarm any suspicion that might afterwards arise. How does that strike you?"

"It's a theory," Maurice admitted. "But Beakbane left the Hundreds genuinely enough. He did really go."

"You are sure?"

"I heard the car. The night was very still. I heard it stop for the gates of the East Lodge to open, and then I heard it go on again, until the sound died away."

"Ah!" mused Sibthorpe. "Now, a mile from the last lodge, on the London road," he continued dreamily, "an empty car was seen at half-past two this morning."

"By whom?"

"By the driver of the mail-cart. And its number was A311."

"That is one of our numbers," said Maurice.

"I am aware of it," said Sibthorpe. "The car was not there when the mail-cart returned at five minutes to three."

"It is certainly strange," Maurice put in, "that Beakbane has not come down to see me to-day."

"I don't think that is strange," said Sibthorpe.

"You suggest——"

"No. I simply mean that he has been requested to hold himself at the disposition of the police in Dunstable."

"Then he did come down?"

"Yes. I intercepted him."

"He's in custody?"

"Not quite."

"How does he explain about the empty car?"

"He doesn't explain. He hasn't been asked to explain. He doesn't know that we—that I know. I'm waiting to see if he will say anything that fails to fit in with the empty car."

Sibthorpe's smile of satisfaction was his own applause.

"But why should Beakbane want to kill my father?"

"Puzzle," said Sibthorpe. "It would be easier to find a reason why Emile Berger should have killed your father."

Maurice jumped up. It seemed as though he was prepared to play the sternly self-controlled heir up to a point, but only up to a point, and as though Sibthorpe had passed the point.

"Berger!" he cried in violent protest.

Sibthorpe also rose, and waved his hands depreciatingly.

"Let me beg you," he murmured, "not to give way to nerves."

Maurice sat down, humiliated by the detective's soothing, patronising manner.

"Please sit down," said the detective, commanding; as soon as Maurice had sat down, "Thank you."

"No one knows what Berger was doing in the early hours of this morning. Why was he out so early?"

"Let me remind you," said Maurice, grimly, "that the question is not why he was out so early, but why he should kill my father."

"Your father's existence meant war between Germany and France. War between Germany and France would mean the defeat and ruin of France. Every statesman in France feels that."

"Well?"

"Suppose Berger to be a secret emissary of the French government."

"What nonsense! Berger is a sculptor, an artist."

"All secret emissaries are very clever at something besides their own trade. You would surely not expect a secret emissary to label himself. One of the first physicians in London is in the pay of Germany. And permit me to inform you, Mr. Courlander, that the governments of Europe still conduct their private affairs in a manner which, if it were shown on the stage, would be termed crudely melodramatic."

"The idea of Emile Berger being connected in any way with the murder of my father is preposterous," said Maurice, positively.

"Then you know the mystery of the statue?" Sibthorpe asked quickly, but in a very casual tone.

Doncastle and the Marchioness of Herm before leaving London! Fancy him passing the whole day incognito at Tudor Hundreds! He had imagination: that was indisputable.

"Of course," said Sibthorpe, "Crampiron had everything to gain!"

"What does he say?"

"Nothing. He was highly cautious."

"Did you see Miss Crampiron?" Maurice asked self-consciously.

"I did not. However, I may tell you frankly that I am by no means inclined to suspect Mr. Crampiron. By no means!"

"Why not?"

"Because he is not a fool, and because he was not in this house last night. The key to the entire mystery lies in the answer to the question why your father, having gone to bed, got up again, dressed himself, and went out. Some one persuaded him to get up. That some one must have been in the house; that some one must be connected with the crime. You see, Lady Mary is quite positive that she saw your esteemed father in bed."

"How do you know?"

"I have questioned her."

"You have seen my mother?" The tone was one of resentful astonishment.

"Half an hour ago. Also your sister. They were the first persons, except the local police, to learn who I actually was."

"Why did you not come to me first?" said Maurice, with uncontrolled irritation.

"I thought I had already explained that to you," Sibthorpe answered with an intensified condescending blandness.

There was a low double knock at the door; then a pause; then the knock was repeated.

"Come in, Carfax," said Sibthorpe, with gentle imperturbability.

As for Maurice, he stood speechless, inarticulate with wrath and other sentiments.

A very dark man, short and thin, entered the room, shutting the door behind him, without noise.

"My assistant," said Sibthorpe; and he gazed lovingly at Carfax as though Carfax, besides being his assistant, was to be his next meal. The contrast between the two men was of the most striking character. There was no grandioseness in Carfax's demeanour, no largeness of style, no desire to impress. Carfax seemed to be all nose and eyes.

"This is Mr. Courlander," said Sibthorpe.

And Carfax bowed. At the same time he made a small circular movement on the floor with his left foot, which Sibthorpe noticed and which caused Sibthorpe to stop at the commencement of a speech and begin another speech.

"Have you——" he had started, and then he proceeded: "What time is it?"

"There is time for us to examine the body," said

Carfax, in a peculiar voice, still moving his left foot round and round in a tiny circle.

"The body?" Sibthorpe repeated; it was obvious that he was at a loss.

"Yes. Can you come at once, now?"

"Come? Ah, yes! Certainly. Certainly, Carfax. Mr. Courlander, I shall ask you to excuse us—me—for a few minutes."

"My father's body is here," said Maurice, slowly, as Sibthorpe strode towards the door which Carfax had opened.

"Here! Where?" Sibthorpe demanded.

"This way."

Maurice went to the door behind his chair and unlocked it. It gave access to Carl's bedroom. He pushed it ajar, holding the knob, and waited for Sibthorpe and Carfax to approach. They did so, hesitating on the threshold. Within was the gloom of the great bedroom, in which could be faintly seen the form of the bed and its burden. The opening of the door upon that chamber of death, so close to the lighted vivacious study, was like a sudden and sinister revelation.

"Where is the electric switch?" Sibthorpe asked.

Maurice stepped into the bedroom, and in the same instant it was filled with a yellow glare which descended on the coffin like something harsh and cruel.

"Shall I leave you?" Maurice asked disdainfully.

"Please," said Carfax.

And he left them, returning to the study.

He could hear a murmur of talking through the closed door. Then, after quite a short interval, the two men came back.

"Have you turned out the light there?" questioned Maurice. The triviality of the detail showed to what a pitch his nerves had been screwed.

"Yes," said Carfax, relocking the door.

"Sit down, Carfax," said the genial Sibthorpe, apparently unconscious that he was making Maurice more and more angry every moment. "Now, Mr. Courlander, there are one or two questions we—I—should like to put to you."

"Put them," said Maurice, coldly.

But he did not sit down. Nor did Carfax. Nor did Sibthorpe.

"You were talking to your late father last night in the garden?"

"Yes."

"At the other end of the lake?"

"Yes."

"Pardon me if I inquire what passed."

"I was urging him not to proceed further with a certain financial operation."

"Whose success would involve the loss of many lives? I think you put it that way, didn't you?"

Maurice stared at the two men.

"Yes," he muttered.

"Your father refused?"

"Yes."

"Nothing else occurred?"

"No. Just talk."

"Did not your father mention that his own death was the only possible event that could cause the current of affairs to take the direction that you wished?"

"Yes," Maurice replied reluctantly.

"You had forgotten that?" said Sibthorpe.

"Some one must have overheard our conversation," said Maurice, sharply.

"Obviously. After the talk you came into the house?"

"Yes."

"And went to bed?"

"Yes."

Carfax during the cross-examination was gazing upon the floor. At this point he looked up.

"And Mr. Berger wakened you this morning to tell you that your father was dead?" Sibthorpe continued.

"I was already awake——"

"Been awake long?"

"No."

"What time did you go to bed?"

"I suppose about one o'clock."

The two detectives exchanged a glance, as if to say to each other: "Now, while the iron is hot!" But there appeared to be some slight difference of opinion between them as to which of them should strike the iron that was hot. Sibthorpe made a sign. Carfax also made a sign. Meanwhile Maurice was not even regarding them. He was scrutinising his watch-

chain, which he moved to and fro slightly with his left hand. One might have imagined that he was carefully counting the links in that chain—a very curious chain, by the way, which had come out of the ghetto at Mitau and which was one of the few heirlooms in the Courlander family.

Eventually Carfax gently recommenced the description of that little outward curve with his foot, and Sibthorpe put on the air of yielding.

“Not much after one o’clock, at any rate?” Carfax questioned in a charming and persuasive voice. This was his first incursion into the talk.

“Barely one o’clock,” said Maurice, nonchalantly.

“Then,” Carfax demanded with his clear, precise enunciation, “how was it that you were seen in the gardens after two o’clock?”

There was a scarcely perceptible pause before Maurice replied, looking up from his watch-chain—

“I had got up again.” His tone seemed fatigued, but it was bold.

“Merely to take the air?” Sibthorpe put in with magnificent sarcasm.

“Merely to take the air.”

“Have you previously mentioned to any one that you were in the garden after one o’clock?” Sibthorpe resumed the direction of the conversation.

“No.”

“May I ask why you did not tell us before that you——”

“No, you may not,” replied Maurice, in a voice

which most clearly indicated to Sibthorpe that he meant what he said.

“But——”

“Do what you like,” Maurice cried, “but leave me alone. Leave me alone now.”

And they left him alone.

A quarter of an hour later he was walking down the gardens under the dark June night, followed, unknown to himself, by Carfax. Arrived at the road which, beyond the new lake, joined the east and west lodges, he turned eastwards, and hurried to the East Lodge.

The lodge-keeper’s wife, who quite mechanically burst into tears when she saw him, curtsied from her gate.

“Your Jack has a bicycle, hasn’t he?”

“Yes, Mr. Maurice.”

“Lend it to me.”

There was a rush and fuss, and Maurice had the bicycle, and rode off on it, thus leaving Carfax behind. He rode for about a quarter of an hour, and came to the lodge-gates of another demesne, which he entered. Following a curved avenue for a quarter of a mile, he arrived at a house built in a commonplace manner in the Palladian style. He jumped off the lodge-keeper’s Jack’s bicycle and rang at the door. A butler opened.

“Evening, Robertson,” said Maurice. “Miss Norah in?” He passed like an habitué into the house.

And at the prospect of seeing the girl of his love, perhaps of pouring into her sympathetic feminine ear all of speakable woe that was in his heart, he smiled—smiled almost involuntarily as though a weight was already being lifted from him.

“Miss Crampiron is not at home, sir,” replied the butler, who usually said “Miss Norah,” and usually closed his remarks with a friendly “Mr. Maurice.”

“But she will see me,” said Maurice, confidently, “I must, in fact, see her.”

“Miss Crampiron can see no one, sir,” repeated the butler, coldly.

“She has not gone away?”

“No, sir. But my orders are that she can see no one—no one at all,” added the butler, impressively.

Maurice walked out of the house.

He forgot the bicycle, and went off on his feet. The next morning the bicycle was discovered, propped as he had left it, with one pedal on the lowest step, and wet with a shower of rain. It was regarded as an extremely mysterious bicycle, a bicycle to be watched with grave suspicion, until the lodge-keeper’s Jack, told by Maurice, came to fetch it.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE TRIANGLE

**I**N the city of London there is a certain isosceles triangle of which the equal sides are King William Street and Cornhill, while the base is Gracechurch Street. It would be useless to continue the equal sides in order to see whether the angles below the base were equal, for any indiscreet continuing of King William Street would plunge you into the Thames, and as for Cornhill, it merely backslides into Leadenhall Street, and finally becomes lost to all shame as part of the East End. The apex of the triangle consists of three grossly over-rated institutions, the Mansion House (hated by turtles), the Bank of England (hated by people who want first-class advances on second-class security), and the Stock Exchange (hated by everybody). Lombard Street, starting at the apex, splits through the very centre of the triangle like a knife, cuts Gracechurch Street in the exact middle, and goes on its way disguised as Fenchurch Street. This famous triangle is, in size, contemptible; you could, as a matter of fact, put the whole of it into the pond in St. James's Park, or into St. Paul's Churchyard (many persons would be charmed to see it safely deposited in either

of these places). But more money is made in it to the square yard, and less earned, than in any other place in the world, reports from New York to the contrary notwithstanding.

At each of the equal angles stands a church, for rest and meditation; indeed, save a music-hall or so, the triangle lacks nothing. It has, in particular, a perfect mania for banks, insurance offices, bucket-shops (hence its remarkable cleanliness), hosiers, jewellers, chop-houses, and tea-houses. The entire male population seems to spend its time in drawing cheques and directors' fees; insuring its life; buying neckties, clocked-socks, necklaces and bracelets; and consuming chops and Ceylon tea (with sultana). Except waitresses, typists and charwomen, there is no female population.

Now between Lombard Street and King William Street lies Croker's Alley, one of the hundred and one narrow and suspicious lanes of which the triangle is chiefly made up. Most of the lanes lead from Lombard Street to one side or another of the triangle. But Croker's Alley leads through a ravine of buildings devoted solely to the sale of buckets, to nothing but the Regalia; its asphalted course stops definitely at the Regalia. The Regalia is the oldest chop-house in London; there are twelve other oldest chop-houses in London. It is very difficult to find. It had existed a hundred and fifty years before the first customer found it. It is a dirty little hole, its management and its clientèle having a great scorn of

buckets. It has a waiter, a barmaid who is also directress, seven small tables, a stove, two pictures advertising champagne, an old print of Brighton when Brighton was called Brighthelmstone, eighteen chairs, a sanded floor, and a cash-register. The cash-register had inaugurated the second youth of the Regalia. Rumors had travelled down Croker's Alley of the existence of innumerable palaces called Lyons', Slater's, and A. B. C.'s, and it was vaguely understood that these resorts were competing with the Regalia. The Regalia replied with the last word of modernity, the cash-register, an article not to be seen even in a Lyons palace. Nor did the Regalia stop there. It had always served tea, with a touch of whiskey, in the afternoon, and it went on to home-made plum-cake (which it bought wholesale from Lyons). The day when the Regalia announced home-made plum-cake to its patrons was historic, and scarcely less historic was that other day when it inaugurated a first-floor room for chess and draughts.

Late in the afternoon three days after the death of Carl Courlander, a Mercedes motor-car, showing marks of fast travel over country roads, penetrated gingerly into Croker's Alley, and turned round in the wider space at the end thereof. The car was dominated by the furs and the Jewish nose of Slade Beakbane, its sole occupant. He descended from his seat and entered the Regalia—entered it with a fine, genuine sense of importance and of ultimate triumph. Great and unique as Slade Beakbane was in the tri-

angle, magnificent as were his accustomed appearances in other chop-houses and tea-houses, the Regalia had hitherto, by an unwritten rule, been forbidden to him. For Carl Courlander himself had patronised the Regalia, and it is a law in the triangle that where the master eats and drinks, the servant shall not eat and drink, not even though the servant be confidential clerk, be in reality the manager, the soul, of the ineffable house of Courlander. Beakbane had in his time ruffled it with the best at Claridge's, the Ritz, the Troc, the Cri, Verrey's, the Continental, but he had never dared to go into the Regalia save when escorted thither by Carl in person for a business chat over a cup of tea.

Slade Beakbane glanced about him, first at the barmaid, then at the waiter, then at the three customers who were sparsely dotted about the sanded floor, and without a word, but not without that self-consciousness which few men can avoid when they are performing an act before witnesses for the first time, he passed magnificently and mysteriously upstairs to the chess and draughts room, leaving behind him a most visible impression on the faces of the barmaid and the waiter, who knew him. Of the three customers, two had not looked up, and the third was not acquainted with the features of Slade Beakbane.

The waiter lifted his eyebrows to the barmaid, and then went halfway up the stairs to take Beakbane's order. He never went more than halfway up the stairs to take orders. Orders were discharged at his

head as it came to a standstill at the level of the floor of the chess and draughts room. Then he descended, crossed to the bar, and whispered to the barmaid—

“One tea. One toast, thin and well browned.”

And the barmaid seized her speaking-tube and said into it—

“Tea one. Toast one.”

The Regalia did not accept outside suggestions concerning its toast.

“The inquest must be over then, and ‘e’s come up,” the waiter hissed discreetly to the barmaid.

“Yes,” the barmaid returned, arranging her rings. “Has he left any one in that there car?”

The waiter strode to the door, looked out, and withdrew his head.

“No,” he said.

The three customers had caught every word of the whispering. It was impossible that they should not do so. And they all three gazed with excessive interest at the barmaid. She supported their stares with a superior and brazen calm, as if to say: “Yes. Wouldn’t you like to know who’s upstairs! But you just won’t.”

They all knew with certainty, however, that it was the Courlander affair of which the waiter had spoken. No one, during those exciting days, who used the word inquest, could possibly be referring to anything but the inquest on Carl Courlander. Hence they all guessed that it was some person of high importance in the Courlander affair who had brushed by them and

vanished upstairs. And that unseen figure sitting upstairs seemed at once to brood like an obsession over the lower room. For not merely the triangle, but the whole western world, and even the cabinet of Tokio, was intensely absorbed in the Courlander affair; the political machinery of three continents stood still amid the thick vapours of the Courlander affair, waiting for the mist to clear. And lo! one of the chief actors in it had secreted himself in the chess and draughts room of the Regalia!

“Strange there isn’t no specials!” commented the barmaid in her penetrating whisper.

At the same moment could be heard, in the far distance of Lombard Street, the hoarse, violent shouting of a newspaper boy. And the muscles of every individual in the Regalia involuntarily tightened as the sound, fateful and terrifying, came nearer, and, imprisoned within the walls of the alley, gradually grew comprehensible.

“Courlander Inquest. Verdict. Courlander Inquest. Verdict. *Evening Record.* Courlander Inquest. Verdict.”

The effect on the Regalia was quite uncanny in its excitingness.

The waiter rushed to the door.

“Get me a paper, waiter.”

“And me one, too.”

“And me.”

The newsboy, with the burning red and yellow of the *Record’s* contents-bill, stood for a second in the

open doorway of the Regalia, and then was off again.

“Courlander Inquest. Verdict. Courlander Inquest. Verdict. *Evening Record.*”

The sound faded into a vague, meaningless cry. The being in the chess and draughts room had given no further sign of life.

The waiter distributed three copies of the paper, and turned to the barmaid as he unfolded the fourth.

“Read it,” whispered the barmaid.

“‘The proceedings were opened by the Bedfordshire Coroner at ten o’clock,’ ” the waiter hissed. “‘There was no accommodation for the public, and very little for the Press, and——’ ”

“All that was in the earlier edition, all up to Lady Mary’s evidence,” the barmaid interrupted him impatiently.

“Oh! well! ’Ere we are!” he went on hissing. “‘Stop press news. Courlander Case. The telegraphic arrangements broke down.’ That’s ‘ow it is. ‘Maurice Courlander, deceased’s son, followed Emile Berger into the box. He said he had gone out into the gardens after the household was in bed, for fresh air, and had observed nothing unusual and seen no one.

“‘Slade Beakbane, confidential clerk to deceased, was called. He stated he had come down to see deceased on business late at night, and had returned straight to London in the motor-car. Asked whether he had stopped *en route*, he said yes. He had left a large spanner on the floor of the car. It had jolted

out. He had stopped and gone back to look for it with a lamp. He had not found it. But it had since been found by a road-mender. Before leaving the box witness protested to coroner against action of police, and asked if he was under arrest or not. The coroner replied, certainly not. He was perfectly free.

“‘Lord Doncastle was not called and was not present.’”

The service-lift rumbled behind the barmaid’s back, and from a square hole appeared a sudden vision of a teapot and a plate of toast. The waiter eyed it coldly, and, after a brief pause, continued hissing in the stillness of the room:

“‘Mr. Abraham Crampiron gave evidence as to his last interview with the deceased in the statue.

“‘Verdict. Wilful murder against person or persons unknown.

“‘Verbatim report in our extra special.

“‘It is understood police have a definite clue.

“‘Later. 3.20. Lady Mary Courlander fainted.

“‘Consols fell five-eighths.

“‘Lingfield. 3 p.m. Hysteria, 1. Colossus, 2. Early Worm, 3. S.P. Eight to one. Six ran.’

“What did I tell ye about Hysteria—eh?” hissed the waiter.

Reluctantly dropping the paper, he accepted the tea and toast from the jewelled hands of the barmaid and carried them upstairs.

In the head of each person in the room was humming the phrase: "Police have definite clue."

"Well, for me," whispered the barmaid, when the waiter returned, "it's that there dirty little Frenchman as has done it. If you ask *me*."

A few minutes later the Regalia was visited by Maurice Courlander. And the tragedy, for the Regalia, of that visitation, was that the Regalia did not recognise Maurice Courlander. The destinies of Europe were about to be affected in the Regalia, and the Regalia had not the slightest suspicion of the fact. Maurice, though he had lived much abroad, knew the city fairly well—nearly as well, perhaps, as a city man knows Brighton. But he was not so familiar with its places of refreshment. It had been his custom to lunch at one or other of his West End clubs on those days which ~~he~~ gave to his father's offices. One noontide, however, Carl had taken him to the Regalia for lunch, and the strange house had remained in his memory ever since, together with the query why Carl, who was so exigent at home, should have cared to frequent such a house. And now, having followed Beakbane to London in another car, and feeling suddenly the need of sustenance—he had not tasted food since breakfast—he had stopped his car in Lombard Street, opposite the entrance to Croker's Alley, and had dismissed it.

He passed without hesitating through the ground-floor room, and climbed the stairs, because he recalled that after their lunch Carl had led him upstairs

for coffee, and that the upper chamber had been deserted.

"Give me a whiskey and soda—Irish," he threw to the waiter from the stairs.

And there, in the chess and draughts room of the Regalia, he encountered Slade Beakbane.

Maurice was startled and did not show it. Beakbane was startled and showed it. Beakbane stood up. Though he would have given anything to be able to remain seated and treat Maurice, who was much his junior, as one man of the world treats another, the old shorthand clerk in him would insist on standing up, foolishly standing up.

"Don't disturb yourself, Beakbane," said Maurice, curtly, and took the next table to his. Whereupon Beakbane sat down again.

And there was a silence until after the waiter had delivered the whiskey and soda. Even then the silence was not at once broken. Yet it was not thoughts that were wanting. What a spectacle for each if he could have gazed clearly into the mind of his fellow! They had conversed only formally since Carl's death; they had, indeed, scarcely seen one another. Possibly they had avoided one another by instinct. For the general public suspicion lay like a faint cloud equally upon both of them; they had that in common. It was conceivable that that had kept them apart at a crisis which surely demanded a free interchange of ideas between them.

The waiter had naturally spilled the soda on the

marble table in pouring it out. Maurice regarded those little ponds, and lighted a cigarette. Beakbane's tea was finished. He regarded the horrid débris of the repast, the tea-leaves in the cup, the black atoms of charred bread on the greasy surface of the plate; and he too lit a cigarette. And the afternoon light of summer fell on them slanting through the old bow-window.

Maurice could have easily supported the silence; he had, as a fact, no intention of speaking. But Beakbane's nerves, though less sensitive than Maurice's, were less under control; he had the qualities of the Jew. He could not bear the situation, and he spoke.

"I suppose you were wishing to see me, sir," he said.

He had fully intended never to behave to the son as he had behaved to the father; he had meant to adopt an entirely different attitude, the attitude of the man who is indispensable. But here was that thrice-cursed shorthand clerk obstinately peeping out again and tagging a quite unnecessary "sir" on to the end of the speech!

"No," Maurice replied carelessly. "I wasn't thinking of it. I came in here by sheer chance."

"I ran up to town as quick as I could in the Mercedes, sir. I expect you came in the De Dion."

"I did," said Maurice.

"I slipped in here for a cup of tea before going to

the office. There's a tremendous lot to be done there, sir."

"Yes," said Maurice.

"You are going there, sir?"

"I am," said Maurice.

"Well, sir, you'll find your hands full, if I may say so.. What with the inquest and so on, of course I haven't been in the place for two days."

"You and my father managed things between you," said Maurice, with a smile which Beakbane's eager vanity seized and accepted at its face value.

"Yes," he replied gravely, at last finding courage to assume the attitude of the man who is indispensable. "Mr. Courlander left everything to me that he didn't attend to himself. Now that he's gone, there is only one person who has got the ends of all the strings in his hands."

"And that's you?"

"It is," said Beakbane.

"I know my father often said that he didn't know what he should do without you," Maurice remarked suavely. This was an absolute lie. And Beakbane should have been aware that Carl Courlander was the last person to make such a statement about anybody. However, the lie corroborated so exactly Beakbane's notion of himself, and it was so extremely and unexpectedly agreeable, that Beakbane received it with the same simplicity as he had received the smile.

"I'm sure I'm very flattered," said he.

"The truth is, I imagine," Maurice continued,

"that while nominally only my father's secretary, you were really general manager?"

"Well," said Beakbane, enchanted, "I wouldn't care to say just that. But I may tell you, Mr. Maurice—Mr. Courlander—that at the meeting of the Association of Peruvian Bondholders last week I was practically in the chair. And Sir Nicholas Farll thanked me afterwards. Now that was certainly Harris's business——"

"Harris?"

"Harris is supposed to be in control of our South American department. But when it came to the point, I had to take charge. And it's often like that. Then the Bill department—well, I needn't go into details. Perhaps I *have* been a sort of general manager—without the salary," he added, venturing in his turn to smile.

"What did you get, Beakbane?"

"Two thousand, sir. Oh! I won't deny it was a good salary. But a general manager of Courlander's—well, you know what salaries are for such posts. Pardon me, sir, but do you mean to attend much to business yourself?"

"I decidedly do not," said Maurice.

"Then you *will* want a manager," said Beakbane, emphatically, "and no mistake."

"What's the post worth—in your opinion?" Maurice asked.

Beakbane was taken aback by this swift movement of things. "It's worth, in my opinion——"

"Is it worth ten thousand, man?"

"I should say it is, sir," said Beakbane, boldly. Ten thousand was a noble, an unlooked-for figure. But he received it with a well-simulated calm, as he stroked the fur on the cuffs of his motor-coat.

Maurice took a cheque-book from his pocket.

"Any ink here?"

"I have a fountain pen, sir," said Beakbane, unhooking a Swan from his breast pocket and opening it. Maurice eyed the pen; he hated and mistrusted fountain pens; but he did not refuse this one.

And he began to fill in a cheque.

"By the way, Beakbane"—he looked up—"when were you last paid your salary?"

"Four days ago, sir."

"Oh! That's all right. Well, this cheque is on my private account. There mayn't be enough money to meet it, but I don't suppose they'll refuse it."

He handed a signed cheque to Beakbane. It was made out to Beakbane in the sum of two thousand pounds.

"Er——" Beakbane began, examining the cheque.

"It's a year's salary in lieu of notice," said Maurice, politely. "Under my father's will I have sole control of everything, and I find myself compelled to dispense with your services. You need not trouble to come to the office again."

He jumped up and quitted the Regalia, handing a shilling to the waiter as he passed out. He bent down in front of the Mercedes, started it, mounted to

Beakbane's habitual seat, and drove off with the car which by long use Beakbane had almost come to regard as his private property.

In Lombard Street he was immediately identified. Or rather, the car was identified, Beakbane having thoroughly familiarised Lombard Street with the sight of that car. Through forty windows a hundred and forty clerks spied the car among the thinning traffic, and in the excitement of spying it forgot for a moment the supreme sensation of the day—the approach of six o'clock. Maurice travelled slowly, for he was accustomed neither to the car nor to the traffic, and the vast ball of the sun was in his eyes as he went westwards. A furlong or so of cautious avoidance of cabs and vans, and he drew up in front of the Courlander building. The one-armed commissaire, with three medals on his breast and a band of crêpe round his solitary arm, had perceived the car afar off, and was waiting on the pavement to assist that great dignitary, Mr. Slade Beakbane, to alight. When he saw that the car contained not Beakbane, but the new master of the house of Courlander, he pulled his white moustache from mere nervousness; then saluted.

Maurice, descending, nodded.

"Has Dubois called here with the De Dion car?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. A quarter of an hour ago. He's round at the back."

"Tell him I shall want to go home in ten min-

utes, either in this or the De Dion, whichever he pleases."

"Yes, sir."

Standing an instant on the broad footpath, Maurice glanced negligently up at the pile in front of him. It was not immense, as size is counted in the newer erections of the city. But it was certainly the most sumptuous, and by far the most beautiful, office building between Temple Bar and Aldgate. It had been designed by the young man who created Hugo's grandiose stores in Sloane Street, but in Courlander the young man had had to deal with a finer connoisseur even than Owen Hugo; and the result was accordingly more distinguished. Moreover, the young man had had just as much money to spend, though the place had not a quarter the extent of Hugo's. The contractors had surpassed themselves by completing it, from the cellar excavations to the tapestries of the principal's room, in three hundred and nineteen days—a feat which had given rise to considerable correspondence in the *Builder* as to whether, considering the circumstances, it did not constitute a record of celerity—for Carl had made it a condition that throughout the operations the work of the firm must be continued without interruption in such parts of the old building as could be left standing. There were only four storeys; on either hand were blocks of offices reaching nearer to the skies than Courlander's; but Carl's property was, and remains to this day, in its magnificent and costly simplicity, the most im-

pressive thing in Lombard Street. On the left of the main portal was a curved brass plate bearing in quite small characters the sole word "Courlander," and on the right was another plate exactly similar. There was no other indication of ownership.

Men of various ages, and in various states of hurry and preoccupation, were continually passing out of the turmoil of Lombard Street into the seclusion of the building, and out of the seclusion of the building into the turmoil of Lombard Street; for death could not be permitted to interfere with the vast and complex financial machine. Only the lowered blinds, with their valances of drawn-thread specially manufactured at the Royal School of Needlework, showed that death was not ignored.

Maurice climbed, like any other man entering on business, the seven marble steps leading to the level of the central hall. On one side was the Underwriting department, on the other the South American department; the whole of the first floor was devoted to the Bill-discounting department—perhaps the most lucrative of the Courlander activities. He traversed the hall, with its six swing doors, in three opposing pairs, which gave access to the rich and lofty rooms where the *élite* of London deskdom gained a dignified livelihood. At the end of the frescoed hall a lift-boy received him and raised him to the second floor, where Carl's private and inviolable office was located. He emerged from the lift and thanked the lift-boy, whose heart was beating against his buttons. The lift-boy

did not guess that Maurice's heart was beating more furiously than his own. Maurice was about to execute a tremendous decision.

He went suddenly, as it were with a brutal onslaught, into his father's massive office, the holy of holies, the very shrine of the triangle.

"Good-afternoon, gentlemen," he said at once.

Three old men were grouped at the large oval table under the central window. They were Mr. Isidore Antonio, manager of the Bill-discounting department, Mr. Augustine London, manager of the Underwriting department, and Mr. Jabez Harris, manager of the South American department; the trinity whom the deposed Slade Beakbane had made a practice of patronising. Each seemed to wait for his companions to speak.

The Queen Anne clock over the wide arch of the chimney-piece struck six.

"I am half an hour late," said Maurice, who had shut the door behind him, but who had not advanced beyond the edge of the Persian carpet into the apartment. He looked excessively young as he faced the aged trio.

"Not at all, Mr. Maurice," said one of his audience, lamely.

"And I cannot stop now. I have to return to the country instantly," he proceeded. "I had meant to talk with you at length, as no doubt you gathered from my telephone message. But I must be content simply to announce to you that I am, under my

father's will, the sole proprietor and director of this house, and that I intend to retire at once. The business is to be wound up with the least possible delay. Kindly take the necessary steps. I shall be with you to-morrow to arrange details."

"It—it is to be sold?" Antonio tremblingly inquired.

"No. Wound up!" said Maurice.

"But——"

"I will show you to-morrow that my dictionary, being an expurgated edition, does not contain the word 'but.'"

"About the Morocco loan, Mr. Courlander?" hazarded Mr. Augustine London. "The papers are ready to be——"

"The Morocco loan will not go through—that above all things," replied Maurice, quickly. "I have communicated with Berlin."

"Does Mr. Beakbane know?" asked Harris.

"Mr. Beakbane does not know. Mr. Beakbane has left my service."

And Maurice quitted them as abruptly as he had quitted Beakbane.

The De Dion car was awaiting him in the street.

He sat silent and contemplative in the tonneau as Dubois guided and urged the rapid car through the northern skirts of London past Barnet into Bedfordshire. In somewhat less than an hour they were within a mile of the East Lodge of Tudor Hundreds, and

on the left hand the sun hung red and low over the weald. He tried to arrange his thoughts; and he could not arrange his thoughts. The truth was that he had not yet begun to act from reason; he was still acting in obedience to profound and imperious instincts. The terrific issues involved by his father's death, the manner and the horror of that death, the manifold ordeals of the inquest, the secret and disturbing appearances and disappearances of Sibthorpe and Carfax, the enigma of the threatening statue, the suspicions, the mysteries, and the perils of the unique situation; these things mingled together in his mind like a morose and heaving slate-coloured sea at twilight of a winter's day. And afloat on the unsure surface of the sea was a pale, intangible wraith—the wraith of Norah's love for him. This it was that had brought him back with such swiftness from London. He had not seen Norah. Norah had escaped him, and baffled every effort on his part to meet her. He had fled to London, persuading himself that he hated her, or at least that he despised her for her inconstancy, her infantile capriciousness. He had fled away from London full of the consciousness that he was more than ever under her magic sway, and terribly determined to see her that night, if not by guile then by force. He was sure that she had remained under her father's roof.

As the car came to the cross-road which led to the gates of Crampiron's home, he told the chauffeur to stop.

"Wait here," he said. "And if I do not return in half an hour, go on to the Hundreds."

And he struck off to the right.

No sooner had he done so than he saw in the distance a hatless figure approaching him at a run. It was the figure of Norah.

He hurried forward to meet her, and they faced each other in silence.

"Is it you?" he murmured in a hard voice.

"It is I."

"At last, then!"

"Yes, Maurice."

She burst into tears. He noticed that her hair was disarranged and that her appearance showed other signs of deep emotion.

"What do you want?" he asked gently.

"You," she replied in a whisper. "I was coming to you."

Strange and troubling climax to a day of spiritual horrors!

At that very moment the newsboys were filling Piccadilly Circus and all the evening haunts of London with the cry that Courlander's was to close.

## CHAPTER VIII

### NORAH

**O**N the morning of the discovery of the corpse at the foot of the statue, Abraham Crampiron, to the surprise of the servants at Iving Park, came downstairs to breakfast fifteen minutes later than usual. The servants at Iving Park had had other surprises that morning. In the first place a letter had arrived by special messenger for Miss Norah from Tudor Hundreds and had been delivered into her hands in her bedroom at an hour strangely early. And in the second place Miss Norah also was late for breakfast. Now Miss Norah was the most capricious and the least calculable fragment of humanity that the servants at Iving Park had ever encountered. But her caprices and her incalculability did not begin until after Abraham Crampiron had departed to catch the nine-ten train for town. There was no trifling with her father's breakfast. Instead of being like the first act of a comedy, as a breakfast should be, that breakfast was like the fifth act of a tragedy—a dull tragedy. Norah's rôle in the tragedy was to dispense three cups of tea to her father, and to dispense them with the accuracy of a chemist. He had been known to fling cup and all into

the buggy waiting in case Mr. Crampiron might desire it. Mr. Crampiron got into it, and then caught, instead of the nine-ten, the ten-nine for town. He regained Iving Park shortly after midnight, four hours and a half late.

In the meantime only her maid had seen Norah, who did not quit her bedroom during the entire day, and who gave the strictest orders that she would see nobody whatever, not even Mr. Maurice Courlander.

As regards breakfast, similar phenomena occurred the next morning. Norah did not appear, and her father did not explode. In the afternoon Norah walked solitary in the fields behind the kitchen garden, but she hid herself again and dined alone in her little sitting-room, while her father dined alone in the dining-room.

The situation was incomprehensible to the household staff.

The second day after the news of the murder was the day of the inquest. And Norah was still a recluse. Mr. Crampiron attended the inquest. He came back from the inquest between three and four o'clock, went into his bedroom, remained there about a quarter of an hour, and then descended to the drawing-room, where he rang the bell.

"Where is Miss Norah?" he asked the butler.

"In her room, sir."

"Tell her I want to speak to her, will you?"

"Certainly, sir."

In two minutes the butler cautiously re-entered the drawing-room.

"Miss Norah says she cannot come down, sir," he enunciated.

Having transmitted this unimaginable defiance of a tyrant whose power had never till then been seriously challenged, the butler fled and waited in ambush for unusual and exciting events.

Abraham Crampiron was an indisputable and resounding success in the world of business; but in social relations he was not. He had never appreciated the value of amenity, of kindness, of mere superficial politeness, nor the futility of stamping, of raging, of general rudeness. He had no sentiments for the graces of existence, no feeling at all for beauty, and very little for the pleasures of the domestic hearth. He only lived while he was doing conjuring tricks with money; the rest of his time was a tedium which he had no skill to charm. For all the satisfaction which the real use of it gave him he might as well have collected sand as money.

He had needed a house in which to eat and sleep, and he had bought Iving Park, by the simple process of strolling into Tokenhouse Yard and bidding for it before he had even seen it. He had then purchased the furniture thereof, as it stood, from the executors of a dead baronet, third holder of the title. And he had installed Norah and himself in the place, together with other immortal souls in the shapes of servants engaged at a registry office. This accomplished, he

had shown no further interest either in the house or in the grounds. It was a negative, unpretentious kind of a place, of mediocre Palladian architecture, and the furniture had a respectable ugliness which was partly Georgian and partly Victorian. Nevertheless, there were the makings of a dignified home in Iving Park, if only Abraham Crampiron had comprehended what a home ought to be. But as he did not comprehend what a home ought to be, Iving Park resembled less a home than a rather large dwelling hired for six months by American pilgrims. Here and there in the lower rooms little indications of Norah's feminine taste and feminine longings for a genuine home struggled like plants in an unfriendly climate. Her two rooms upstairs, arranged entirely according to her private fancy, were indeed a refuge to her. But they were in the nature of an oasis rather than an integral portion of Iving Park. Moreover, Abraham Crampiron had never set his heavy feet in them since the day of arrival.

And now, climbing the central stairway, with its faded Axminster, he directed himself towards those rooms. A tremendous crisis had supervened in the joint career of himself and his daughter—a crisis whose significance she alone perfectly estimated. He guessed, but was not sure.

She had thrown down the gage. He picked it up with instant and fierce decisiveness. Having reached her door, he ought assuredly to have knocked; she was a woman. But he would not knock. He could not

bring himself to knock. He was her father, and since he always thought of her as a child, a child she was. So he seized the white earthenware handle of the door and turned it violently. The door was bolted on the inside.

He had a momentary wish to smash the door, but he resisted it. Then he knocked ferociously.

“Who’s there?” It was Norah’s voice, faint but hostile.

“I am.”

“Do you want me?”

“Of course I want you.”

“I’ll be down in the drawing-room in half an hour.”

The insolence of it maddened him. Half an hour! She was forcing him to attend her convenience during half an hour.

“I’ll thank you to be quicker than that!”

No answer.

He returned to the drawing-room and sat down, in the ill-fitting black suit which he had donned for the inquest.

In twenty-five minutes Norah Crampiron entered. Near the centre of the room was a hexagonal mahogany table with a lacquered workbox on it that had probably belonged to the wife of the second baronet of the Iving Park dynasty. Norah advanced as far as the table, and, touching it with her right hand as if for support, stood to face her father. She had the air of being exhausted by fatigue. Her dark and burning eyes were dilated; she was pale; her breast

rose and fell in quick breathings under her black robe, and her feet were restless.

"What have you been doing this last day or two, miss?" Crampiron began.

"I've been keeping out of the way," she answered icily.

Perhaps in that moment, as he caught the new note of that voice, the father had his first inkling of the composition of the stuff of which the daughter was made. If he had not acquired knowledge before, his ignorance was due to chance and not to any weakness on Norah's part. Two years earlier, when the girl was twenty, and she and Maurice Courlander had fallen in love with each other, and Abraham had opposed a formal and positive refusal to the match, she had been ready to pit her obstinacy against his. "Come back in a year," she had said to Maurice in a secret interview on the eve of Maurice's departure to study financial conditions in Buenos Ayres. "I will not write to you in the meantime, as father has forbidden it. But I shall then be of age and able to please myself in every way; and I will marry you whether he wishes it or not—that is, if you still want me," she had added with a pouting smile. And she would have done so. Crampiron, however, had relented—on the condition that the marriage should not take place till Norah was twenty-three—and thus he had never known the risk which he had run of being routed in open warfare. As for Norah, her virginal existence—divided between a passion for multifarious

reading and the hobby of delicate embroideries—had gone forward with outward placidity under her father's cold, preoccupied gaze.

He did not seem inclined to ask her what she meant by that curious phrase, "keeping out of the way." There was a pause. And then he said, with an accent of compromise—

"I've just been to the inquest."

"On Mr. Courlander?"

"Yes."

Such was the first reference to the crime that passed between them. And Norah's voice was as steady and unmoved as Crampiron's own.

"Well?" she inquired.

"They've brought it in as murder, naturally," said Crampiron. "And there's a good deal of suspicion attached to Maurice, seemingly."

"Maurice?" She straightened herself.

"Maurice," repeated Crampiron, firmly. "Has he seen you?"

"No."

"Nor written?"

"He's written. But I've not answered."

"You did well, my girl," said Crampiron, grimly.

Norah displayed no curiosity as to the assumed basis for suspicions against Maurice, and her father offered no explanation. Precisely at the point where an active and eager interchange of ideas might have been expected, the strange interview grew difficult almost to taciturnity.

"Is that all?" she asked. Decidedly her attitude was amazing, bewildering, inexplicable. And it was the things that she did not say, the questions that she did not put, the emotion that she did not show, which rendered it so. There had occurred a horrible event, intimately affecting herself, and she appeared to be stirred as much as she would have been stirred by the rumour of a fatal railway accident in Arizona!

"No," her father brusquely replied. "I've got to tell you that your engagement must be broken off."

"Why?" The interrogation shot from her like a dart.

"Why!" cried her father, smacking his knee. "Why!" he reiterated loudly. "You ask why! Because the Courlander family isn't a family to marry into now. Because it's all too fishy. Because Maurice is—because it's not good enough. Because I won't have it! That's why."

There was another silence. Norah, instead of touching the table, gripped it.

"I shall not marry Maurice," she said in a low voice.

"That's all right."

"But not for any of your reasons!"

"What's that?"

"You heard me, father."

Inarticulate anger rumbled in his throat; and then he remarked—

"So long as you agree not to marry him, you can

choose your own reasons. If you take my advice you'll begin to think about young Oldcastle again."

Lord Percy Oldcastle was the son of a guinea-pig who in the city had formed a fairly correct notion of Crampiron's wealth, and who had suggested an alliance between the Scotch peerage and the South African plutocracy. Lord Percy, having seen Norah, had done all that he could to carry out the parental suggestion, but his success with Norah had not been radiant.

She put her perfect lips together, and leaned her body forward.

"It would have to be done quickly, wouldn't it?" she said, and laughed drily.

"As quickly as you please," Crampiron responded. He was obviously disconcerted.

"Lord Percy is quite—straight, isn't he?" she queried.

"He's as straight as they're made. Much straighter than his father, if you ask me. And he's as fond of you as he can stick; you know that."

"And do you think your daughter is the proper sort of a girl to marry a straight man?"

The frightful, destructive scorn in her clear, frigid tones roused in Crampiron something which hitherto he had managed to control. He sprang up, and at her, and with clenched hands and veined forehead stood over her, a threat incarnate.

"What do you mean?" he shouted.

"You know what I mean," she said, and drove him far over the edge of exasperation.

He seized her by her frail shoulder in a convulsive grasp.

"By G——" he began.

Then she wrenched herself from him, and fled with physical fear in her eyes. And even as she departed his tone changed, and he called after her in desperate appeal—

"Norah! Norah!" And hurried into the hall.

Norah was already flying down the steps to the gravel.

He hesitated, and the momentary hesitation perhaps altered the course of both their lives. For when he decided to follow and catch her and use a different language to her, she had vanished from sight.

## CHAPTER IX

CRAMPIRON CONGRATULATES MAURICE

ONE afternoon about sixteen days later Abraham Crampiron arrived at the portals of Tudor Hundreds in his buggy. He never used an automobile; on the part of a rich man it is a pardonable eccentricity not to do so. The Crampiron who drove up to the mansion of the Courlanders was such a Crampiron as had not been seen there before. The Courlander footman recognized him rather by his black mare than by his features. He was most noticeably thinner, and his face had the expression of a well-brought-up dog who has just begun to realise that he is lost and that his next meal is no longer a certainty. It was not a cowed nor a hopeless expression; it was an expression of anxious misgivings controlled by proud memories of the past.

He descended from the buggy, and penetrated into the immense hall of the Hundreds before speaking a single word. Then, seeing no superior functionary, he said to one of the footmen, as it were confidentially, as though he wished to propitiate him.

“Where is Arable?”

Arable was the name of the Courlander *maître d’hotel*.

"Mr. Arable has left, sir."

As a fact, Mr. Arable, famous in the world as a pearl among butlers, had been seduced from the Courlander service by a duke who had long desired him. The departure of Arable from the Hundreds was one of the few outward symptoms of change there; but it was a grave one.

Crampiron paused.

"Mr. Maurice in?" he asked in a friendly whisper.

"No, sir, he isn't," said the footman, and feeling himself to be flattered, he added, gratis: "I believe Mr. Maurice is in London, sir."

"You aren't expecting him?"

"So far as I know, sir, Miss Courlander is not expecting him," said the footman, growing cautious.

"She is in?"

"Yes, sir."

"I must see *her* then," said Crampiron. And he sighed.

"I will inquire, sir," said the footman, retiring to the telephone.

Almost immediately after the footman had confided Crampiron's wishes to the telephone, Curtis appeared magically out of the lift. Curtis gazed at Crampiron with solemn invitation in his slanting eyes, and Crampiron comprehended that he was to be escorted to Millicent, and entered the lift. Curtis had attached himself definitely to Millicent in the absence of Maurice. He would have made the finest *maitre d'hotel* in Europe, but no European lackey would

have deigned to serve under him; for European lackeys he was the yellow peril.

With Eastern pomp he manœuvred the lift, waved Crampiron out of it as though he had been waving him out of a pagoda, and preceded him to the door of Millicent's boudoir. At that door Millicent was already standing, expectant, in black, with a gold chatelaine depending from her waist, a figure serene, sad, and coldly beautiful.

She gave him her hand.

"How glad I am to see you!" she said. "You are better? Maurice was so sorry you were not well enough to come to the funeral. Only you and Emile were asked, you know."

"I, too, was sorry," answered Crampiron. "How is your mother?"

"She is perhaps a little better, but she is still in bed. I nurse her myself. She had a bad night, but she is asleep now."

Millicent had shut the door and gone towards the window, and, Crampiron following her, she suddenly perceived his face in the full light.

"Why, Mr. Crampiron!" she exclaimed. "How ill you look! You must have been very much pulled down. We had no idea——"

"Yes," said he, a little grimly. "I'm not up to the mark. The fact is, I'm very much upset."

"Do sit down," Millicent urged him.

"And I've come to you. I didn't want to. But I've come."

"What is it?" she questioned calmly.

"Where is Norah?" He put the query with characteristic bluntness.

"Norah! Isn't she with you?"

"No. And hasn't been for a fortnight."

"She hasn't been nursing you?"

"Nursing me?" He seemed at a loss.

"Yes. In your illness."

"Oh! In my illness! No, she hasn't."

"Mother and I thought that the reason she had not come over to see us was that she could not leave you. I sent her a note. But there came no reply." There was a passing shade of sisterly resentment in Millicent's tone. "But do you really mean to say you don't know where Norah is?"

"I do not."

"Mr. Crampiron! How extraordinary! Why didn't you come to us before? When did you last see her?"

"On the day of the inquest," said Crampiron.

"And she didn't say she was going anywhere?"

"Not a word. I did not care to come to you before. I was sure she was not here."

"Have you and she had any difficulty?"

"Not the slightest," said Crampiron, firmly.

Millicent reflected.

"What are you thinking about?" Crampiron demanded.

"I'm thinking about Maurice. Why has Maurice said nothing?"

"Maurice has said nothing then?"

"Not a word as to Norah. Therefore he can't be concerned about her. Therefore he must know where she is."

"I don't think Maurice knows where she is," said Crampiron.

"Why not?"

"Because I think she has broken off her engagement with him."

"Broken off her engagement! But for what reason?"

"How can I tell?" Crampiron said slowly.

"Has she hinted to you that she meant to break it off?"

Crampiron nodded.

"But Maurice would have said something to me!" Millicent protested.

"Not if she had forbidden him to."

"Why should she forbid him?"

"Ah! I came here to ask questions, not to answer them. I can't answer yours, Miss Millicent. And I don't know that I really expected answers to mine. I came—I don't know why I came. Only there was nothing else left for me to do."

"It is a very good thing you did come," Millicent responded. "Maurice will be here at five o'clock; he telegraphed to me this morning."

Crampiron started.

"Half an hour," he murmured, glancing at a time-piece on the writing-table,

"No," she said. "That clock is a quarter of an hour slow. You can question him yourself. Oh, Mr. Crampiron——"

Crampiron noticed that she was crying. There was no sob, no abandonment; but the tears coursed one after another down the delicate cheeks.

"What are you crying for?" Crampiron queried clumsily. He would probably have known better how to treat a cow than a woman.

Millicent wiped her eyes.

"Excuse me," she said. "I'm rather unstrung with nursing mother. And I'm so disturbed about poor Norah. I can't understand it, not the least bit. I feel certain that there must be some perfectly simple explanation. And yet——"

"Yet what?"

"Maurice has been very mysterious these last few days; in fact, ever since the funeral. So has Emile. I thought it was because he was helping the police in their——"

She stopped again, and this time she hid her face in her hands.

"He has only slept here once in the whole fortnight," she said brokenly. "I haven't told mother."

Crampiron drew his upper teeth over his lower lip several times, and uttered no word.

"I think I'll go," he said at length.

At the same moment there came through the open window the sound of an approaching motor-car. Millicent sprang up, and glanced out for a second.

"Yes," she said. "It's the De Dion, closed. You mustn't go, Mr. Crampiron."

She picked up the little house-telephone which stood on the table near the travelling clock, rang, and received an answering ring.

"Is that Mr. Maurice?" she inquired, her mouth at the transmitter of the telephone, her eyes on Crampiron. "What? Oh! Well, ask him to come up to me immediately." Then to Crampiron: "Yes, it's Maurice."

Crampiron walked about uneasily. And the two waited in an apprehensive and tense silence.

Then the door opened, and Maurice came in, a motor-cap still in his hand. He saw Crampiron and drew away.

"What do you want?" he asked of Crampiron in a hard, curt, and yet an intimidated voice.

"Where's Norah?" The old man fronted the young one massively.

A pause ensued.

"Maurice, what——?" Millicent began in accents of entreaty.

"Be quiet, child." Maurice abruptly silenced her. "Norah is here," he went on to Crampiron, and his tone was violent, inimical. He backed into the corridor. "Norah," he called, "come here."

And Norah, in hat, veil, and jacket, appeared like a vision in the doorway.

"It may interest you to know that we were married this morning," said Maurice, icily.

"Married! You two!" yelled Crampiron.

There followed another terrible pause, and Norah, running to Millicent, fell into her arms.

"Well," Crampiron rasped, and every feature of his blanched face seemed to be in travail, "I congratulate you. By G——, I do!"

And he strode out.

## CHAPTER X

### CONFESSiON

“**H**USH! hush!” whispered Millicent Courlander, soothingly.

Norah, sobbing, hung on her shoulders, her face half hidden in the calm bosom of the older girl. The sobs, difficult and dry, diminished and grew less painful, and then Millicent led Norah gently to a small sofa that projected from the wall at right angles to the fireplace, and persuaded her by gestures and mild force to lie down upon it. And Norah surrendered to the influence, extending herself in an attitude of utter weariness and nervous exhaustion, and covering her eyes with her hands.

“You mustn’t give way like that,” said Millicent, in a firmer tone, a tone somewhat chiding and ever so slightly inimical. She gazed at the girl a moment, as if to be satisfied that the crisis was spent, and turned to Maurice, who had stood moveless since Abraham Crampiron quitted the room.

“Maurice,” she began with a certain proud and courageous timidity, “is it true? Or isn’t it? Do you really mean it?”

“What? That we are married? Of course we are married!”

In an instant he had divined her subtle hostility, and he spoke defiantly. Not content with speaking defiantly, he drew from his pocket a long folded piece of paper, unfolded it, and put it with a smack on the table, open for her inspection. "There's the certificate, if you like. Two and seven it cost."

"I am sorry," said Millicent. "I don't want to be unpleasant. But we have always been sincere with each other, and we must be sincere now. I'm sorry."

"Why?" he questioned harshly.

"Why!" she repeated, controlling herself. "If you did not expect me to be sorry, why did you do it secretly? Why did you say nothing to me at all? Father dead scarcely more than a fortnight and you go and get married! Father killed, and no one knows who killed him, and the police working everywhere, and you go and get married! It's simply inconceivable! What am I to do about mamma?"

"Tell her, of course."

"Indeed I shall not tell her."

"Why not?"

"It might kill her."

The voice was final in its judgment of what Maurice had done. It was obvious from Millicent's whole bearing that her profoundest feelings had been outraged. This girl, trained in the precepts of the nicest decorum, in whom found ideal expression the very finest English social culture, with its delicate sensitiveness to things which cannot be put into words, and its faint lack of imagination—this girl was be-



"Well, by Heaven! I congratulate you," he said.



yond measure shocked that in her own family a marriage should have succeeded with such indecent quickness a tragic death. And it was the highest tribute to her extraordinary self-control that she remained in perfect command of her voice and her demeanour.

And Maurice, who had anticipated a hundred difficulties and anxieties, had quite failed to anticipate just this one. He, on his part, had been so influenced and moulded by the reiterated hammering of events, that he seemed to be no more the son of Lady Mary and the brother of Millicent. That in marrying at that juncture he would cruelly lacerate their susceptibilities had never occurred to him. But he saw it now.

"You don't know what happened," he said, gloomily. "Her father actually assaulted her. And she simply had to run away. Imagine it! I found her! He had wanted her to break off the engagement! To break it off! Why? Heaven knows! Because some one had murdered father! Anyhow, I found her, and I took her, and—and—we're married. It was the only thing to be done."

"But why didn't you tell me?" Millicent persisted. "You've seen me nearly every day."

"I knew you'd got enough on your hands."

"Norah might have come here. She could have stopped with me until—until things were different. That would have been the proper course. I don't know what her difficulties at home were, but whatever they were, she could have come here."

"Crampiron would have found her, and taken her away."

Millicent lifted her chin. "I should like to see the man who would take from me a person who was under my protection," said she, with the tremendous pride of her mother's race. "Well, the thing is done, and we must make the best of it. What are you going to do? Stay here? Remember I absolutely insist that mother shall not be told at present."

"Stay here?" Maurice repeated mechanically.

"Are you thinking of taking a honeymoon?" Millicent inquired, and though she had not intended it, there was a most perceptible note of satire in her voice.

Norah, on the sofa, had not stirred, had not moved a finger. She lay there as if struck by an excess of emotion into immobility. Millicent glanced at her and glanced at Maurice, and then, with her face set, Millicent quitted the boudoir. She too, like Norah, was approaching the end of her physical resources. And the young married pair, in deep mourning, were left in the boudoir, and Millicent, in deep mourning, hastened along the interminable picture-lined corridor of the house, going she knew not whither. She could not seek solace with her mother. And who else remained to her? Certainly not her mother's relatives, for, except the most distant, there was none surviving; Lady Mary had outlived her family. Her thoughts wandered to Lord Donastle, who had naturally paid a visit of condolence, behaving thereat with

an impeccable correctness and a perfect tact. Yet the souvenir of Lord Doncastle's exquisite conduct left her utterly cold.

And then, exactly as she was passing it, a door opened, and Emile Berger came out of his room. She started violently.

"How you frightened me!" she exclaimed.

He smiled gently and shook hands.

"I'm so sorry," he said.

"You came down with Maurice and—and Norah?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You've been helping Maurice?"

"Yes."

"How could you?" she passionately demanded, and burst into tears. She had done with calmness and self-control for a while.

Emile Berger gravely took her hand again, and she let it rest in his.

"I understand what you feel," he said in a low voice. "I am all sympathy with you. But when one has a friend, one has a duty. Maurice decided definitely to marry in secret. He called me to help him. I helped him. What would you have? I said to myself he was perhaps wrong. But he is my friend, and he was resolved."

"Wrong!" murmured Millicent, wiping her eyes.

"Listen!" said Emile, persuasively. "There is only one thing to do. You must accept it. You must forgive. In considering Maurice's mental distress,

which forced him to act so, you must forgive. Imagine what he must have suffered in the suffering of Norah! To understand all is to forgive all, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

There was authority, as well as persuasion, in his tone. Millicent gazed up at him, and the first inception of a sad smile lighted her face.

"No doubt you are right," she said with her lips.

Her humid eyes said what the eyes of every woman will say one day or another to him who is strong enough. They said to Emile more plainly than speech: "You are indeed a man!" And though he was in the midst of grief, and much grieved himself, it was the happiest moment of Emile's life.

Immediately afterwards they both saw Maurice Courlander, with his wife, leave Millicent's boudoir and disappear down the corridor in the opposite direction from themselves.

Alone with Norah in the boudoir, Maurice had said gently—

"I must go outside and think."

And Norah, without a word, had risen swiftly from the sofa and gone after him. She followed him down the many-cornered grand staircase, and across the hall, where two of Lady Mary's puppies were playing in charge of a footman, and so out on to the terrace, the great glass doors of which were propped open. The gardens and the lake seemed to languish under the magnificence of the July sun, which was, however, now declining. And afar off, at the summit of the

avenue of elms, the statue raised its glittering height with the massive and marmoreal indifference of heroic sculpture.

Norah looked at Maurice, plaintively, beseechingly. He was the master of that superb demesne; and she was his lawful wife. Yet she felt like an interloper, like one who had no right to be there—she who had the power, if she chose, to say to every other woman in the house: “Go.”

“Poor little thing!” said Maurice, endearingly.

His tone caressed her, and she was grateful, for Maurice had been terribly preoccupied and morose, even in his passionate kindness to her, during the whole of her stay in London at the flat of some French friends of Emile. Maurice had decided that they should marry, that they must marry, and she had accepted his decision; and everything had been arranged for her, and she had accomplished her personal share of the formalities as though she had been walking in a dream. In those days of suspense, while Maurice was being pushed to paroxysms of futile anger by the mysterious tactics of the detectives, who avoided explanations and seemed to get no nearer to the solution of the problem, and while Norah hid in her proud and trembling soul secrets which for her life’s sake she dared divulge to none—in those days it was that they tasted, each of them, the dread and the pain of the tragic love which bound them together. One fact, and one fact only, emerged with clearness from the confused phantasmagoria that their recent

existence had been—the fact that their mutual passion was intensified beyond computing. Sorrow and tragedy lay about them; but they loved. Their love was dire; but they loved.

And so when Maurice murmured: “Poor little thing!” Norah’s heart lightened ever so slightly. And she said to herself, steeling her determination—

“Now is the time!”

Without more words, Maurice descended from the terrace towards the level of the lake, and Norah kept by his side. Here and there a gardener was working, either on the parterres or on the lawns, and the men touched their caps, and Norah nodded and tried to smile graciously, but Maurice seemed completely to ignore their presence. He was meditating upon exactly what he should do, and how he could contrive things so as to spare Millicent’s feelings without wounding Norah’s. And he thought, in his simplicity, that Norah’s brain was similarly employed. He realised that he was married, that he had a wife on his hands, and that the situation was exceedingly complex. Not once, not for a single hour, since the fatal morning at the foot of the statue, had he been able to dominate and classify the multitudinous whirl of ideas, sensations, suspicions, fears, that raged in his head; and he was in no better case now.

They passed the boat-house, and the sky-reflecting waters of the lake, asleep in the sunshine; and at last they stood at the foot of the rising avenue. The statue, with its eternal enigma, appeared to invite, to

beckon, to compel; and they obeyed its summons and went forward. At every step it grew bigger and more menacing. And when they reached the plinth it towered tremendously above them like some new sphinx as silent and as baffling as the old.

Maurice mounted the plinth and drew a key from his pocket.

"What are you going to do?" asked Norah.

"I am going into the statue."

"Why?"

"I must. I want to see if the detectives have been here again. I shall not be long. Wait there."

And he wondered what occult instinct was forcing him to enter the statue.

"No, Maurice," Norah replied with a nervous and imperative gesture. "If you are going in, I will come too."

He signified an uneasy, unwilling assent, unlocked the disguised door, and held it open for her.

She shivered as she crossed the smooth level of the plinth, just as if the corpse which had once lain there lay there still and she had had to step over it.

"You go first," she whispered.

He went in. She followed. He turned on the electric switch, closed the door, strode unhesitatingly to the lift, pushed back the iron grille, and illuminated the lift as he had illuminated the entrance hall. She stepped into the lift; he joined her, shut the grille, pressed a button, and the lift shot upwards. They were very close together in the lift; their shoulders

touched, and the triple mirrors reflected their pale and anxious faces. Her breast heaved. Her eyes were lowered. He drew his fingers through his black hair. He would have liked to play with hers. He would have liked to take her in his arms, and forget for one immortal moment all the tragic earth. But he could not; something forbade him.

"And this is my marriage day!" he reflected.

The lift stopped with a jerk. They got out. He turned on more lights, and they found themselves in the great chamber of the statue. They were alone. No two people could have been more alone, even in mid-Sahara, than they were in the secrecy of the statue's vast bosom. The sheer fantasy of the statue conquered them, settled on their cowed spirits as something unnatural and equivocal, something that defied the intellect. And not merely the fantasy of the statue, but its memories, weighed them down. Ash-trays full of cigar ash, and one or two cups containing the lees of coffee, and a liqueur glass which had obviously held yellow chartreuse, still littered the dusty mahogany of the table. The chairs were arranged in groups, as though still occupied by persons in conversation. For under the orders of the police nothing had been moved. Nobody, in fact, save Maurice, Emile and the detectives, had been permitted within the statue. The beautiful room, once so hospitable, now so inhospitable and sinister, held the irrecoverable past.

"Yes," said Maurice, pointing to a semicircular

patch at one corner of the table, comparatively free from dust. "They've been here."

"Who?"

"Sibthorpe and Carfax. Sibthorpe has sat down on that corner of the table to explain his idiotic theories to Carfax. I've never told you, Norah, but I'll tell you now, that that sublime ass suspected that I was not unconnected with the catastrophe that happened to my poor dad. On the night of his murder I also was out in the gardens. I went out to calm myself. You know how disturbed I had been. I came back after about an hour and a half and went to bed. I didn't see anything of the dad. In fact, I didn't go near the statue. I spoke to nobody. There was not likely to be anybody to speak to. But there was some one. I did see one man. I recognised him in the dark. It was a young German who was in charge at night of the electricity works down by the West Lodge—you know. Well, I wasn't aware that he had seen me. But he had. And the Carfax person, not Sibthorpe, got hold of him. When Sibthorpe first interviewed me he didn't know. But Carfax came and told him. The same fellow—the German, I mean—must have overheard my father and me talking near the lake, earlier, before the dad went to bed. Now I'd said nothing about my midnight excursion into the gardens. I'd scarcely thought of it. And do you know, when Sibthorpe sprang it on me, like that, it gave me a turn. It looked tremendously suspicious, because I hadn't said I'd been out. And I

saw how easy it is for perfectly innocent people to be suspected of the wildest things. Upon my soul, I shouldn't be surprised if Sibthorpe is still suspecting me."

"My poor Maurice!" Norah gasped. He noticed that she had gone very pale.

"Ah!" he chided her gently. "It's no use feeling indignant. The ass Sibthorpe is only doing his business. It's his business to suspect every one. But he's altogether too mysterious, is Sibthorpe. Or else it is Carfax. Now, at the inquest no questions were put to me as to my being in the gardens at the time of the murder. Not a question! Yet I had given no explanation to Sibthorpe. I haven't been in the humour for giving explanations to any one. And what's more, the German wasn't called to give evidence; not a word was said about him. And he's left the estate. And no one seems to know where he's gone. How do you explain that? Have they still got their eyes on me askance, or have they not? By heaven, sometimes it makes me feel as if I had—had——"

"Had what?"

Maurice spoke coldly and disdainfully: "Committed the murder—without knowing it!"

Norah's answer was to sink to the ground.

"Don't!" she murmured. "I can't stand it."

He stood over her, like a philosopher full of the weariness of wisdom. He did not attempt to raise her. "My dear," he said, "I fear you have married something excessively sardonic, excessively moody,

and capricious, and dark. I feel you don't understand me. I don't understand myself. I have the most extraordinary notions. I don't know one moment what I shall do the next. I——”

“You wish already that you hadn't married me!” cried she, and her voice expired in a moan.

He bent and lifted her, picked her up swiftly and with a violent caress clutched her to himself. “Ah, no!” he said, with a sudden sincerity almost frantic. “Not that! Anything but that! Child, when I think of what my life would be if I hadn't you—and I do think of it sometimes—I almost go mad. It is marrying you that will save me. You mustn't mind how I talk. You mustn't worry about anything. You must just quietly remember all the time that you are my salvation. Don't fret about Millicent. That's nothing, simply nothing. It will all come right. We'll go away to-night.” He paused, gazing at her eyes, which were close to his. “How fond the dad was of you!” he exclaimed. “He thought nearly as much of you as I do.”

He loosed his grip on her and leaned an elbow on the high window-sill. She stepped away from him. His mood had changed again.

“Norah,” he said in a new, solemn voice, “I didn't half appreciate the dad. I don't think any of us did. He was the best-hearted man I ever knew. And when I remember how rude I was to him—that night—and how polite he was to me . . . ! Conceited idiot! That's what I was. If I'd been fifty times more right

than I was—and I still think I was pretty right—I'd no excuse. Imagine me trying to teach him! And he was so *decent*—there's no other word. And so quiet with it all! Do you know why I'm closing up the business? Simply because I won't have any one meddling and muddling with it, now that he's gone. . . . He's gone, and it shall go! Thank the Lord, we've money enough and too much—or rather, thank *him!* If ever I accomplish anything in life, it shall be something fresh. But I've got one thing to do before I start on my own life—and I'll do it." He spoke savagely, and pressed his lips together.

"What?" Norah demanded bluntly.

"Find the murderer," said Maurice. "I don't expect anybody else will—I know those d——d Scotland Yard people now. But I shall. You'll see. I won't rest till I do. Norah, you can't guess how I feel about it. I myself never guessed how fond I was of the dad till I saw his corpse."

He undid the catch of the window and looked forth at the expanse, and the breeze met his face. Then he became conscious of a pressure against his leg. Norah was on her knees, and had convulsively seized him. It was strangely disconcerting to see this girl, usually so proud and restive, in such an attitude of abandoned supplication.

"My dearest!" he protested.

"Hush!" she interrupted him. "Listen to me. You must listen to me!" She stopped and rose. "No," she said. "I cannot tell you like that." And she



"Hush! you must listen to me!" she said.



walked away almost to the other end of the room, and, sitting down on a chair, put her elbows on the table and her chin in the palms of her hands. "Stay there, Maurice," she said in a low voice, with burning eyes, "while I talk to you."

Maurice thought she was suffering from some form of nervous hysteria. He waited, undecided what to do.

"I know who killed Mr. Courlander," she said.

"You know!" he repeated in amazement, in anger, in the acutest distress. And the whole expression of his face changed. He did not attempt to discredit her statement. He accepted it instantly; the authority of her tone forbade him to do otherwise.

"Yes," she proceeded. "Did *any* of us sleep that night? You had upset me. I could not rest. I got out of bed and lay on a sofa that there is under the window of my room, and the window was open. I don't know what time it was. I heard people walking along the asphalt path that leads to the kitchen garden round by the house. They were talking. There were two of them. They were talking very quietly, almost in whispers; but it was so still that I could hear everything they said."

"And what were they saying?" Maurice's throat was as though full of hot sand.

"One of them was telling the other that he was afraid he had done for Mr. Courlander at the foot of the statue. Although he was talking almost in a whisper he was very excited; I could be sure of that.

And the other said, ‘What with?’ And the answer was: ‘With this.’ And then they passed on. I couldn’t hear any more. And it was so horrible that I dared not move. Then afterwards I began to fancy I must have dreamed it. And when it was light I dressed and went to the statue, and I saw——”

Maurice advanced a step.

“Did you touch—my father?”

“Yes. I could not believe he was dead. So I——”

“What time was that?”

“Perhaps about five o’clock.”

And Maurice remembered Emile’s conviction that between his first and second visits to the statue the corpse had been disturbed.

“Then you went back home?” He did not recognise his own voice.

“Yes.”

“And now tell me who the men were,” he demanded, with all his features distorted.

“One of them was father.”

“And the other?”

“I don’t know.”

“Which one had——” he hesitated. “Which one was it who confessed?”

“Father.”

“Ah!”

There was a deep silence in the great chamber of the statue. Norah had not moved. Her little chin was still in her long, thin hands.

Maurice advanced towards her. She screamed

with terror, not getting up, but pushed back her chair. And he stopped.

"And you have waited till to-day to tell me!" he muttered savagely. His hate of her pierced her as a dart might have pierced her.

"Maurice!" she cried; "I loved you too much! I know now I was wrong. But I said nothing because I loved you. I thought if you knew before, you would never marry me; that the world would never let you marry me; and so I——"

"You were mad!" said Maurice.

"Yes, yes. But I——"

"What things a woman is capable of!" he burst out tempestuously.

"It was because he guessed that I knew, that I ran away from him," Norah wept. "Maurice, you must have pity on me! What was I to do? I've told you because I thought you were a great man, with a great heart; because I thought you——"

He made a sound of the bitterest disdain.

"Hold your horrible tongue!" he yelled. He was no longer Maurice. He was an embodied instinct of revenging justice.

And she, a girl, a child after all, unused to the elemental, staggered by the terror of the forces which she unchained, tried in despair to save, with a single sublime appeal, her life's happiness from destruction.

"You'll let him go," she sobbed. "You'll let him leave England and go. You are noble enough for that. He's my father and——"

"You'd better leave," Maurice said with hideous calmness.

"Dearest——"

"Leave me, I say!" He stamped his foot.

She obeyed. As she was quitting the room, he threw at her like a bomb—

"Good-bye! If he were forty times your father he should hang. . . . Noble enough to forgive! My God!"

He turned from her. She vanished.

## CHAPTER XI

### AN EARLDOM

FOUR days later Mr. Slade Beakbane knocked, in the late afternoon, at the doors of Iving Park. Being no longer in control of an automobile, he had come down from London by train, and he had walked from Dunstable station because there had been no vehicle there to meet him. The absence of a carriage cast a melancholy over Mr. Beakbane's arrival. Happily he had not brought his fur coat.

"Mr. Crampiron is not at home, sir," said the butler, opening the doors to Beakbane's question. And he uttered the word "sir" somewhat reluctantly, Beakbane's appearance, without furs, not being impressive.

"I know that," Beakbane replied pompously. "He will be here by the next train." Mr. Beakbane paused. "You surely were aware of that?" he questioned with sternness.

"Yes, sir," the butler admitted.

"Then why did you not tell me at once?" he demanded, crushing the butler almost to inanimate dust. "Be good enough to show me to Mr. Crampiron's study. I am to await Mr. Crampiron. And I have writing to do."

Decidedly Mr. Beakbane had a way of being superior to his inferiors that was both effective and final. It left nothing to chance.

And as he settled himself in the shabby, inconvenient business-room of Mr. Crampiron, giving the butler first his hat with a certain nonchalance and then his stick with a certain nonchalance, he celebrated his victory by an exhibition of magnanimity worthy of a great conqueror. He gave the butler half a sovereign.

"Mr. Crampiron has been away four days?" he suggested in a kindly tone, as though saying: "I have nearly crushed you to death, but I bear you no ill-will on that account."

"Yes, sir, four days," said the butler, brightly, pocketing the money. "Can I get you anything?"

"Oh, dear, no!" said Beakbane, apparently shocked that the butler should have imagined even for a moment that he ever either ate or drank.

Then he opened a little bag which he had brought, drew forth some papers, and began to write at the American roll-top desk, an ugly contrivance which in no manner recalled the Empire secretaire in the sanctum of Tudor Hundreds.

In a little less than an hour a loud-ticking alarm clock struck six with an unpleasant voice. Five minutes afterwards Abraham Crampiron, followed by the butler, stepped energetically into the room. Beakbane nervously looked up. He would have much preferred not to rise—he would have much preferred just to

nod carelessly to Crampiron as Crampiron nodded carelessly to him. But, as in the Regalia with Maurice Courlander, so now, he could not refrain from rising. Something within him stronger than himself compelled him to rise, and to greet Crampiron with elaborate respectfulness. He was glorious against butlers, but he had never yet succeeded even a little bit in proving that he was the equal of his superiors.

Crampiron stared in silence at him, Beakbane was obviously very perturbed.

"Dinner at seven. For two," snapped Crampiron, turning swiftly on the butler.

"Yes, sir," said the butler, holding forth a bent salver. "The letters, sir."

"Stick them down anywhere," said Crampiron. The butler obeyed and left.

Crampiron resumed his examination of Beakbane.

"Sit down, you fool," Crampiron exclaimed abruptly. "What the Hades is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, sir," said Beakbane, meekly. "I got your telegram. So you've been to Berlin!" Crampiron removed his coat, dropping it on a chair, and stood displayed in a flannel shirt with detachable white cuffs—which cuffs he detached and threw on the floor. He then hitched up the shirt-sleeves by means of red elastic bands which encircled his arms above the elbow, and sat down opposite to Beakbane, puffing. The day was hot.

"Look here," said he, grimly, "have you never seen

a murderer before? Because if you can't get accustomed to being with me, I shan't have much use for you. If you can't convince yourself that a murderer is very much like any other human being, you'd better shunt."

"Oh, of course, sir——" Beakbane began, entirely nonplussed, and furious in his heart that he was nonplussed.

"Murder is a mistake," Crampiron continued. "I never meant to murder; but that's no excuse—for sheer clumsiness. I never meant to tell you. But that's no excuse—for doing a silly thing under the influence of temporary excitement. However, we needn't discuss my errors of discretion when I'm in a temper. All I beg is that you will not make eyes at me as if I was a freak at Barnum's. Murder has been done. Good! Nobody is any the worse. At least one person is a little the better. So try not to be a sentimental ass. You've made out those lists?"

"Yes, sir."

Beakbane passed some papers across the desk, and Crampiron looked at them carefully.

"You do this sort of thing pretty well," said Crampiron.

"Yes, sir, I think I do." Beakbane paused, and then splashed suddenly into a subject which had a profound interest for him. "I suppose I am now to consider myself in your employ, sir?"

"Well," said Crampiron, "either you're in mine, or I'm in yours. Which do you think it is?"

"Certainly, sir. It's all over the city that I've transferred my services to you. There is a tremendous talk about it."

"Is there, indeed! And am I considered a devilish lucky fellow?"

"That is not for me to say, sir," said Beakbane. "I merely referred to the matter, *en passant*, as—er—terms have not been arranged between us."

"I'll give you a thousand a year."

"But Mr. Courlander gave me two thousand."

"Yes, I know. You've often told me. But then, you see, Mr. Courlander is dead. I'll give you a thousand. I don't honestly think you're worth more. Some sorts of a scoundrel are worth several thousands a year. But you don't happen to be one of those sort. No. I'll only give you a thousand. Of course you'll have opportunities of making a bit on the crooked, and I've no doubt you'll avail yourself of them."

Mr. Slade Beakbane was bewildered and lost in the mazes of Crampiron's character. He did not know which way to turn.

"I was really expecting even more than two thousand, sir," he ventured; and the enterprise of that statement needed some courage on his part.

"Why?" Crampiron blandly queried.

"Well, sir——"

"Listen!" said Crampiron, with a swift transformation to formidableness. "For all your pleasing and ingenious treachery to our late friend, I've already paid you—haven't I?"

"Yes, sir."

"How much have I paid you?"

"Eight thousand and five pounds, sir."

"Pretty good, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Handsome?"

Beakbane said nothing.

"Handsome?" Crampiron repeated in loud and threatening accents.

"Yes, sir."

"That part of the affair's settled." Crampiron breathed as if in relief. "You were not, then, expecting a higher salary because you've sold to me certain Courlander secrets at a high price. Good." He changed his tone to one of rasping satire. "Were you by any chance expecting a higher salary because I happen to have told you that I'm a murderer? Did you fancy in your touching simplicity that I should submit to blackmail? Because if you did, you were calculating badly. In the first place you can't harm me without harming yourself. You're something in the nature of an accessory, you know. And in the second place I shouldn't care if you did tell. Not twopence!" He snapped his fingers. "I'm that kind of man."

"I assure you, sir——"

"You needn't. I'll give you a thousand, and it's every cent you're worth. If Courlander's hadn't put up their shutters and if you had stayed with them, I'd have given you two thousand. Yes, five! I'd have committed follies! But you're only a pretty ordinary,

sort of clerk now. You've nothing to sell. And as Courlander's is finished, there's nothing that I want to buy. So say no more."

There was a silence.

"Blackmail!" Crampiron burst out again, laughing harshly. "A nice idea." He turned and leaned over the desk, and whispered: "You aren't the only person who knows."

"Who——" Beakbane was too agitated, too undone, to construct a whole sentence.

"My daughter knows. She overheard me. And she ran away. And she's married to Maurice Courlander. When first she cleared out I was upset. I was afraid. But I've got over that. I can see I'm perfectly safe. You daren't tell. And she can't. Strange I didn't see that at once. She *can't* tell. She might possibly tell her husband, of course. But then *he* couldn't tell—it wouldn't *do!* The situation is a very curious one."

Beakbane made a supreme effort to be great, and he succeeded in smiling. "Very curious!" he agreed, endeavouring to assume the air of a connoisseur in situations.

Crampiron glanced at the clock.

"You've wasted twenty minutes of my time with your confounded sentimentality and your abominable avarice," he said. "Now to business. The loan is arranged."

"I thought you had been to Berlin," Beakbane murmured, astonished.

"So I have," said Crampiron. "When I say that the loan is arranged, I mean that the loan is arranged through Berlin and not through Paris. It's all the same to me." And Crampiron could not forbear a proud smile of self-satisfaction as he went on relating his achievement. "Having killed a man, I thought I might as well take his place, and do his work for him. I saw Lord Doncastle, and told him that from a sense of patriotism and merely in order to save the country, I would transfer my services from Paris to Berlin. He was delighted, the fool! He was quite moved. I wired to Paris that the thing was off. And I put my money at the disposal of Berlin on terms which Berlin accepted. Germany will control the loan to the Sultan. France will quarrel with her. There will be a war. Europe will be turned upside down. The English government will stop where it is. And that sublime nincompoop Doncastle will continue to fancy that he is saving the British empire from destruction. And I've done it in four days, including the journey there and back."

"It is indeed remarkable!" said Beakbane, lamely.

"Eh? What?" shouted Crampiron, who was opening his letters.

"I say it is remarkable."

"I should think it was! And look at that. Ever see that fist before?"

He tossed a letter over to Beakbane, and Beakbane read—

“10 Downing Street,  
“18th July.

“MY DEAR CRAMPIRON,—In reference to our interview yesterday, I have seen the two colleagues whom I indicated to you. And I am now in a position to assure you that, in case the operation which you have so patriotically undertaken is successfully concluded, I shall venture to suggest to His Majesty the propriety of bestowing upon you a peerage.—Believe me, my dear Mr. Crampiron, yours most faithfully,

“DONCASTLE.”

“I’ve seen him this afternoon—since this letter,” said Crampiron, snatching the missive from Beakbane’s hands. “He’s beside himself with delight at the prospect of saving his neck—I mean the British Empire; and so I stipulated for an earldom. When I’m Earl of Iving I’ll make some of those Mayfair mandarins sit up.”

“I congratulate you, sir, most heartily,” said Beakbane.

Crampiron merely stared at him with a disdainful quizzicalness.

“You’d better run along *there*”—he jerked his elbow mysteriously in a particular direction—“after dinner. Just to see if there’s——” He paused.

Beakbane nodded.

At that moment the butler re-entered.

“Two gentlemen to see you, sir.”

“Who are they?”

"They won't give their names, sir."

"Then I shan't see 'em," said Crampiron.

In this assertion, however, Abraham Crampiron was mistaken. He did see his two visitors, because they walked into the privacy of his room. The first was Sibthorpe and the second was Carfax.

"Are you Abraham Crampiron?" Sibthorpe demanded, pulling down his coat over his vast paunch.

Crampiron hesitated.

"What the devil has that got to do with you?" he said.

"I have a warrant for your arrest on the charge of murdering the late Carl Courlander. And I warn you that anything you say now may be used against you later."

The refuser of mere baronies, the stipulator for earldoms, sprang like a ferocious bull at Sibthorpe. But he was neglecting Carfax. Carfax possessed an astonishing dexterity with handcuffs, a dexterity which never failed him.

## CHAPTER XII

### A PASSING FLY

THE road to Bedford ran white and gently curving past the gates of the East Lodge of Tudor Hundreds. Maurice's grandfather had built a stone wall along the whole of that side of the estate—a wall about ten feet high, which had cost about a thousand pounds a mile to construct, and whose mellow lichen-covered monotony is one of the charms and one of the vanities of the district. The regularity of the wall, with its massive buttresses, is broken at the lodge by a semicircular sweep of forged ironwork, and in the middle of the semicircle are the mighty bronze gates, surmounted by Occhevalli's famous phoenix, which experts consider to be second in interest only to the quadruple gates at the northern or principal entrance to the Courlander estate. Between the gates and the roadway is an expanse of lawn, kept with almost the same meticulous care as the interior lawns, and that expanse of lawn is protected from the feet of the vulgar by a series of low, squat stone pillars, supporting a heavy chain, which between each pair of pillars sinks to the grass by its own weight.

Except for a road-mender who, by the aid of a

piece of string and two wooden pegs, was making even the border of grass on the opposite side of the road, there was no sign of activity in view. The road came into sight and went out of sight, and along the whole stretch of it within the field of vision, perhaps about half a mile altogether, nothing moved but the road-mender. It lay as the Romans had planned it, silent, quiescent, venerable with the dusts of centuries, gleaming in the afternoon sun. With the solidity of the endless wall and the steady defiance of the gates, it represented the ancient virtues, the immemorial traditions, of rural England.

But inside the gates the white curtains of the tiny endmost window of the lodge were moved from time to time, quickly and discreetly, only to fall again for a space. And four eyes would appear momentarily and gaze with intense curiosity, and then disappear. They were the eyes of the lodge-keeper and the lodge-keeper's Jack—the Jack who owned the bicycle. A similar curiosity excited the soul of the road-mender, but owing to his exposed situation, he was obliged to restrain it to narrower limits. Nevertheless, as he bent down, he would now and then take a hasty glance, with his eyes wrong side up between his legs, at the semicircular expanse in front of the gates.

This curiosity on the part of the humble was natural and excusable. For a very singular phenomenon was to be observed in the neighbourhood of the gates. The young owner of Tudor Hundreds, mo-

tionless, with his hands deep in the pockets of a black lounge suit, stood on the grass before the gates. And close by him, also with hands deep in pockets, stood his friend Emile Berger—the Frenchman whose recognisable mark to the natives was that he often wore in the mornings and the afternoons a flowing black necktie which the natives deemed to be grotesquely large. The two men had stood where they now stood, with scarcely a gesture, for more than an hour and a half. And since the spot which they had chosen for their vigil was a highly unusual spot, the inquisitiveness of the populace was exercised and troubled to an extreme degree. You might walk past the entrances to all the other country mansions of England and never see an owner standing by the roadway or the public side of his own gates. In the opinion of the people it was scarcely dignified. And the news of the phenomenon had passed with the magic rapidity of strange tidings into far places. The next road-mender, a mile and a half nearer Bedford, was aware of it—he had been informed by a postman on a bicycle—and was wondering; and every servant in the Hundreds was equally aware of it—was equally wondering.

“Don’t you think we had better go in?” Berger suggested in a low voice.

Maurice shook his head.

“No,” said he. “They’re bound to be coming soon.”

“Unless something has happened,” said Berger.

"Nothing can have happened," said Maurice.  
"Every precaution was taken."

"One never knows."

"Look here, old chap," Maurice exclaimed testily,  
"if you want to go, go. But I'm staying."

Berger shrugged his shoulders and lifted his hands  
in a Gallic manner.

"Listen!" whispered Berger in a startled tone.

A sound came from the southwards, a sound of an  
approaching vehicle.

"No," said Maurice, with ears cocked. "That is  
an automobile."

And a motor-car swam with easy speed into view,  
trailing clouds behind it, and, insolently tooting, bore  
past the gates four polar bears with fearsome gog-  
gle-eyes, and vanished to the north.

"I told you," said Berger.

But as the heavy mist of dust settled slowly in the  
windless stagnation of sunset, a black form was dis-  
cernible at the point where the motor-car had ap-  
peared. It was a common country fly, laboriously  
drawn by one horse.

"There they are!" Maurice muttered in accents of  
excessive perturbation.

"My friend," said Berger, "do not be excited."

"I'm not excited," Maurice replied. "I'm no  
more excited than you are."

The Frenchman again shrugged his shoulders.

With exasperating deliberation the vehicle drew  
nearer, and at last, at a slow, fatigued trot, it reached

the gates—and went on northwards, in the direction of Bedford, in the direction, that is to say, of the county gaol. Maurice threw one rapid glance at it, and then lowered his eyes to the grass and kept them there until it was fifty yards away. In the interior of the fly he had glimpsed the figure of Abraham Crampiron; and by Abraham Crampiron the figure of Sibthorpe the detective, and on the seat facing them the figure of Carfax, the other detective. He gazed steadily at the retreating carriage, and kept gazing until long after it had disappeared.

“Now I hope you are satisfied,” said Emile Berger, with an intonation that was full of regret, of compassion, of hostility, and irony.

“Satisfied!” said Maurice, turning on him violently. “I shall be satisfied when that scoundrel is hanged! Not before!”

“Ah!” Emile sighed, as if to himself; and added: “Have you really considered what you are doing?”

“Am I, or am I not, bound to see that my father’s murderer comes to justice?” Maurice demanded hotly.

“You are bound to remember that your father’s murderer is your wife’s father. I ask you again, for the fortieth time, have you sufficiently thought of that?”

“I have no wife!” Maurice burst out.

“Yes, you have,” Emile persisted.

Maurice glared at him. “I have no wife,” he repeated. “So far as I’m concerned, she’s free. She can go where she likes, and she can do what she likes,

and she can have all the money she likes. But she shan't have me. Why, man! that woman would do anything now to save her father. I know she would! Didn't I show you her letter? She married me to save her father. It was a trick. But it failed. Knowing what her father had done, she married me! It's inconceivable, that's what it is. I won't have anything to do with her—you understand? And let me tell you that any one who after this chooses to have anything to do with her will not be a friend of mine.” He stopped, apparently waiting for Emile to challenge him; but Emile remained silent. And Maurice continued: “I can't bear to think too much of my father's death. I should go mad if I did. Every day I realise more and more what a splendid character he was, and the magnificent way he used to treat me—me, with my silly criticisms of him! Yes, and his love for us all. . . . And him to be killed, brutally killed, by that unthinkable villain! What! I ought to have let Crampiron off, ought I, for the sake of Crampiron's daughter?”

He laughed bitterly.

“You'll see,” he finished succinctly.

“Better come in now,” said Emile, with marked quietness.

“I don't think I'll come in,” Maurice answered.

“Better come in. It is nearly seven.”

Maurice stared at the ground. “It's going to be a duel between her and me,” he said obstinately. Then he glanced at Emile, and Emile sustained his gaze.

"Are you coming?" asked the Frenchman.

"No."

Emile left him, passed through the wicket to the right of the great gates, received the curtsey of the lodge-keeper, and followed a path through the gardens to the house.

That night after a lonely dinner—Millicent was still sequestered with Lady Mary for meals—Emile, having seen nothing of Maurice, went forth again to find him. He found him in precisely the spot where he had left him, moody, mysterious, unresponsive.

"Been here all the time since?" Emile asked.

"Yes."

"Do you know it's nearly ten o'clock?"

"I've heard the clock strike once or twice."

In the summer darkness Emile could plainly distinguish Maurice's figure, but he could not decipher the look in his eyes. He hesitated, made timid by the fear which a soul undergoing a grave crisis will always inspire in a sympathetic soul. Without another word he put his arm into Maurice's arm, and drew him away. Maurice offered no resistance, and they passed together through the wicket, which the lodge-keeper shut and locked behind them, and so along the transverse drive that connected the East and West lodges, as far as the lake. There Maurice halted. To the right, the illuminated windows of the house were reflected in the surface of the dreaming lake. To the left, the statue, a huge pale monster in the gloom of night, rose above the sombre masses of the

elm trees, sphinx-like in its eternal attitude of power. The enigmatic effect of it was overwhelming. It seemed to form a part of the undiscovered and undiscoverable secret which lies at the heart of life. It seemed to be the symbol not only of the tragedy of the Courlanders, but of the universal tragedy. And to Emile it was incomprehensible that he, by the artist's creative force, had thought that terrible Titaness into existence. How much more it meant than he had meant it to mean! How alive and significant it was in its everlasting immobility! And yet he knew it to be nothing but blocks of senseless marble mortised together and laid one upon another!

Maurice started from his meditation.

"Did you see that?" he cried.

"What?"

"A flash in the window of the statue?"

"I fancied I saw something," Emile admitted.  
"Where is the moon?"

"There isn't a moon," said Maurice quickly.  
"Some one must be up there in the statue."

"Do you think so?"

"I don't think. I'm sure. Come along."

And Maurice began to run up the slope, Emile keeping by his side.

"We are bound to collar him, whoever it is," said Maurice, catching his breath.

"Yes," Emile agreed.

And in effect the whole outline of the statue was silhouetted clearly against the lucent velvet of the

sky. And no one could issue from it without being perceived unless that person came straight down the avenue, in which case he would be forced to encounter Maurice and Emile.

The young men arrived at the plinth, and mounted it. And no figure had detached itself from the vast mass of the statue. The door in the hem of the Titaness' robe was securely locked. Maurice looked at Emile questioningly as he took a key from his pocket.

"Odd!" he said.

"We must ascend," said Emile—"that is, if you are sure that you saw a light."

"Of course I'm sure. You saw it yourself. You know you did."

Maurice unlocked the door, and they entered and turned on the lights, and thoroughly searched the lower hall. Nothing rewarded them. They went up in the lift to the banqueting chamber, and neither in the banqueting chamber nor in the small service room adjoining it did they come across the faintest trace of an intruder.

Once again they eyed each other questioningly, in silence, and Maurice tapped suspiciously at the walls, which gave no sound but that of solid stone.

"No go!" said Maurice, baffled.

"You must have deceived yourself," Emile murmured.

After a little aimless delay they descended to the earth, leaving the interior of the statue in darkness.

And Emile resumed possession of Maurice's arm and led him homewards down the avenue.

As they skirted the lake they both saw a man standing motionless by the northern margin of the water close to the boat-house. The man turned, then ran eastwards, and was lost in the trees.

"After him!" Maurice called. "It's Beakbane. I know his legs."

But Emile clung to his friend's arm.

"No," said he. "Can you not comprehend that it will be better to let him imagine that he has not been seen? If we catch him now, would he not deny that he had been in the statue? We should not obtain from him the secret. Leave him. He will return. You will arrange to catch him in the statue itself. You will arrange to be ready for him."

"But the fellow's been trespassing!"

"What matter? Allow him to trespass once more, when we shall be ready. Besides, we could not overtake him."

Maurice, exhausted by the nervous fatigues of the day, agreed to this suggestion of the cunning Latin mind.

"Old man," he said, in new and more hopeful accents, "there must be another exit from the statue—one that we know nothing about."

"Yes," said Emile.

"And that Beakbane knows everything about."

"Yes."

"Can't you explain it, you who made the statue?"

"How often shall I tell you," Emile interrupted impatiently, "that I was simply the sculptor of the statue! I was not the architect. The architect was a German—there were, in fact, several architects. The statue was carved from the model which I made. But there were problems of engineering which, as I told your father with frankness, I could not solve. He assumed the responsibility for them himself."

"Then you can really throw no light on the business?"

"None."

"To-morrow at dawn we will examine everything, everywhere."

And so indeed they did. And the inquiry, the search, the probing, the digging, not only in connection with the statue but in connection with the boathouse, lasted many hours. Their efforts and their ingenuity were futile. If the statue had a secret, the statue succeeded in keeping that secret. And Beakbane was not seen again.

## CHAPTER XIII

### BEDFORD ASSIZES

“**G**REATEST sensation since John Bunyan.”

This phrase, telegraphed across the Atlantic to the *New York Journal* by the star reporter sent over to England by that newspaper to chronicle the Crampiron trial, gave a fairly correct idea of the state of the county town of Bedford in the last month of October. And the fact that the *Journal* had despatched a “special” of expensive habits to write up the case, gave a fairly correct idea of the extraordinary, the unique interest which the case was arousing. That special had been busy in Bedford for at least a fortnight. He had torn the entrails out of Bedford on behalf of the United States. He had described most things that were describable, from the Judge’s lodgings and the famous old Unicorn Hotel on the banks of the Ouse, to the Sheriff’s uniform and the private lives of the grand jury who had returned a true bill against the accused millionaire. He could not deal faithfully with the jury that was actually to try the issue, for the reason that the jury was not empanelled till the morning of the trial. But there was not much else

that had escaped his thoroughness. Even a photograph of the Ouse (labelled “slowest river in England”) had been forwarded to an editor insatiable for copy. The one real rebuff that the star reporter had met with was from Mr. Justice Walworth, from whom he had calmly demanded portraits “at different times of his life.” The manner of the journalist’s reception by the celebrated Walworth never leaked out; but that it had not been effusive might be inferred from the detail that the star special had revenged himself by cabling a list of his lordship’s wheezes on the opening day of assize, under the heading: “Why don’t they make him Editor of *Punch*? ”

The American curiosity of the star reporter was merely an example, but a very fine example, of the universal curiosity. Even farmers grew feverish about the Crampiron case. The great yard of the Unicorn contained as many of their dogcarts as it did of the automobiles of the mighty from London—and that is to say something; it is true that an Early Chrysanthemum Show was about to open, but it takes more than an Early Chrysanthemum Show to quicken the pulse of the British farmer.

The Unicorn was full, and the Unicorn put up the price of its ordinary from two shillings to three. It was, perhaps, this fact, with the sight of motor-cars wandering up and down streets, and round and round the Bunyan statue in search of a night’s rest, that finally brought home to the people of the town and county of Bedford that the sensation really was their

greatest sensation since John Bunyan. Columns, pages, in the daily papers; the arrival of multifarious and haughty strangers; the persistent rumours that a European war and the safety of the English Government might depend on the result of the trial; the increase of the local staff at the post office; the more careful watering of the streets by a coquettish borough surveyor—these matters had vaguely impressed them. It had remained for the change in price of the Unicorn ordinary, which had cost a florin since everlasting, genuinely to awaken their imaginations.

They knew, then, that they were famous.

And they became proud. They were as proud as if they had achieved some marvellous feat by their own efforts. It was impossible not to be so. The eyes of the world were on the little, old-fashioned, dignified Assize Court in the middle of the town of Bedford. And probably the proudest people in the whole of the Western Hemisphere were the people inside that court on the morning of the 28th October. There had been an enormous intrigue for seats—an intrigue in which local influence, pitted against more august influences, did not come off worst. There were individuals born and bred in Bedford who obtained by a simple word over a pint of beer at the Unicorn privileges that outsiders would have risked their heavenly welfare to obtain. The pity was that the elaborate arrangements were somewhat upset by the sudden breaking down of two cases that preceded the great case in the calendar. The effect was that Cramp-

iron's trial commenced nearly twenty-four hours earlier than it had been expected to commence.

Numerous persons who ought to have been in Court were not in Court, and numerous persons were there who had no right to be there. These stayed. The most experienced ushers in England could not have shifted them without a row and a squad of police. In two minutes, however, the Court-house had acted like an extremely powerful magnet which drew to itself at amazing speed fragments of humanity from the four quarters of the town. And Mr. Eric Florius, K. C., the prosecuting counsel, had barely introduced himself, in his well-known colloquial style, to the jury, before the interior of the building was miraculously crammed, and sundry important personages who had trusted too much to their importance, learnt that though they had an indubitable right to be in Court, nothing but a direct interposition of Providence would get them there.

"Not guilty," the prisoner had replied with fierce and splendid violence to the formal charge. And by his mere utterance of those two words he had established himself as the most powerful individuality in the whole crowded chamber. By his mere utterance he had instantly screwed up the excitement to the quivering point. At the bottom of nearly every heart had lain a secret and absolute conviction that the man was not accused falsely. And yet the way in which he hurled his denial at the Judge's acolyte, the way in which he faced his audience, shook the

stubbornest preconceptions. Every one felt that the battle was joined at once.

And every one wondered what the battle would consist of, for the evidence at the disposal of the police had been very carefully kept from the general public. None save those intimately concerned knew the probable course of the fight. And so the audience settled down with anticipations of dreadful joy, as it might have settled down in a music-hall to watch a high-trapeze performance without nets. The doubtfulness of the issue was delicious, and the certain assurance that this trial would remain in the memory as the most sensational criminal trial of modern times, brought to the immortal souls present an astonishingly comfortable sense of satisfaction. Useless for the Judge to pretend by his abstracted demeanour that for him this case was just as any other case! The Judge was as satisfied and proud as any one. Useless for the redoubtable Florius, K.C., to pretend that he was on one of his ordinary campaigns. The renowned counsel for the Treasury had sent half a hundred men to the scaffold and had not turned a hair, but on this occasion Florius, K.C., was nervous; you could see it from his snappy manner to his junior. The jury, plucked from the shops and farms of Bedfordshire, were frankly self-conscious, and moved uneasily under the stern gaze of the prisoner as, hemmed in by two officers, he fronted them in his dock.

As for the Press, the Press was simply hot and angry. The Press comprised twenty-four individ-

uals, the very flower of their kind, representatives of the news agencies and newspapers of the entire world; and they had been crammed by main force of ushers into less room than the twelve jurymen. Confined like herrings in a box, they were expected to be bright, amusing, descriptive, and stenographically accurate. The prisoner, who was close to their kennel, withered them from time to time with a glance of contempt. Save the Judge and the jury, there was hardly a person in Court upon whom the stare of that formidable entity, the prisoner, did not fall with disconcerting scorn. The two rows of counsel, with their dirty wigs and clean collars, the placid solicitors, the heavy policemen, the grandese accommodated with seats beneath the Judge's rostrum, the privileged public behind the bar, the unprivileged but successful public in the gallery over the clock: he embraced them all in his comprehensive disdain, sparing not the pretty hats and the pretty inquisitive features under the hats; sparing not even his own legal advisers. Occasionally his eyes would wander up to the emblems of justice behind the Judge, or to the high dusty windows and the gas-grimed ceiling, or would dwell as if with amiable interest on the stuff of the judge's new red robe. The one spot that did not appear to be worthy even of his scorn was the witness-box, which he ignored.

Yet at the outset of the hearing, a passably theatrical moment had occurred in the witness-box. The

Dunstable doctor was called, and he repeated his evidence as given at the inquest and before the magistrates. And when he had done, Florius, K.C., coughed and scratched the back of his creased, crimson neck, and said—

“Now, Dr. Prentiss, you say that the deed must have been done with an instrument having a square, not a round section.”

“Yes, the wound was distinctly square.”

“And about a quarter of a inch in diameter?”

“Yes, at the epidermis.”

“Can you form any idea as to what the instrument could have been?”

“No.”

“Might the wound have been inflicted with this?”

And Florius, K.C., with a fine air, drew rapidly from a piece of paper an instrument about seven inches long, with a point not exceedingly sharp, and a very narrow handle—something like a square instead of a round bodkin, of unusual size.

“Careful!” he admonished the usher who took it from him to pass it to the witness.

“Yes,” said the doctor, after a lengthy examination. “The comparative bluntness of the point would help to account for the remarkably slight extravasation of blood which I have previously commented on.”

“Would you say that the wound had been inflicted with that instrument?”

“Either by that or one very similar to it.”

“Can you tell what the instrument is?”

"I cannot."

"It isn't a surgical instrument of any kind?"

"Certainly not."

The mysterious instrument, followed by the eyes of all the public, was given to his lordship.

"There is dried blood on it," commented his lordship.

"Yes, my lord," said Florius, calmly, receiving back the weapon.

"Aw—permit me to inspect that elegant trifle," drawled a grey-haired, thin-faced barrister, suddenly popping up out of the ruck of gowns; he stretched forth a claw for the instrument. It was Lorimer, K.C., Crampiron's leading defender. He and Florius were intimate friends outside the temples of the law. Within them they were usually intimate enemies, for in games of hazard in which men's lives were the stake, each was regarded as a player who would have been unrivalled but for the existence of the other.

"Come now," said Florius, K.C., to his intimate, "you've had the opportunity of examining this before. However, take it."

The production of such an item of evidence so early in the trial indicated that the Crown had a complete chain of proof. It indicated also that the Crown was conducting the prosecution in a manner very favourable to descriptive reporters. The public was thrilled by the pilgrimage of the strange instrument from counsel to witness, from witness to judge, from

judge to counsel again. But Crampiron, dressed more neatly than he had been dressed for years, appeared suddenly to have forgotten that he had an interest in the trial. He gazed absently at the clock, watching the long hand overtake the short one at noon.

The next witness, Emile Berger, yielded nothing to tickle the palate of sensationalism. Even the special from New York could not transform him into copy. He merely related how he had found the body. Having done so, he withdrew again to the room reserved for witnesses.

Then came Maurice, whose head was a combination of extreme pallor and raven black that profoundly impressed all the women; and the current of popular sympathy, which had been setting a little towards Crampiron, was quickly diverted to the direction of the dead man's family. The audience hoped to enjoy the spectacle of Lady Mary, and perhaps of Millicent Courlander. And the thought of Millicent Courlander, the heir's sister, made them dream of Norah Crampiron, as to whom varied rumours were abroad. She would surely be called for the defence, to prove an alibi or something of the sort. The audience could not conceive the possibility of being deprived of the sight of the beautiful Norah: that would be too cruel, too unmindful of the legitimate demands of a public thirsting for universal knowledge. The audience was pathetically unaware that Norah, watched over by the united efforts of Emile Berger and Millicent Cour-

lander, was safely out of England and subjected to no risks. Her marriage was quite unsuspected.

The evidence of Maurice, being purely formal, was as unexciting as that of his friend. But, as he quitted the box, none could fail to notice the brief and yet terrible duel of sustained glances that passed between the prisoner and the son of the murdered man. The eyes of Maurice might have been saying: "I've been handicapped because the conventions of mankind would not allow me to bring forward your principal accuser—my wife and your daughter. But I shall hang you, all the same." And the eyes of Abraham Crampiron said things that could not be translated into words. Maurice slowly diverted his gaze, bowed to the judge, and, descending from the box, took a seat in the well of the Court by the side of Parculier the lawyer, and in front of Florius, K.C.

Now, thought the general public, they will begin to elaborate the imperfect evidence given before the magistrates as to the accused's absence from his bedroom on the night, the unlocking of his front door at two o'clock, et cetera. The general public had been minutely instructed by newspapers which specialised in theories, but the truth was that it knew nothing whatever. It had never, in its speculations, approached even distantly the core of the case for the prosecution, which had suffered a complete modification since the hearing before the magistrates.

"Call the man Curtis," said Florius, K.C.

The advent of a Chinaman added just the requisite

note of picturesqueness to the scene. He looked very small and very bland as, stepping vivaciously into the box, he put his left hand into his right sleeve and his right hand into his left sleeve. His glance was wide-eyed and of an extreme simplicity, his attitude that of a philosopher finding himself at a pow-wow of barbarians. With fifty centuries of Oriental civilisation behind him, he was to be excused for exhibiting a certain reserved and gentle surprise. Whether it was the fancy dress of the barristers and the Judge, or the presence of gay ladies in those precincts that gave him pause, who shall say?

Many of the public were not even aware that Carl Courlander had had a Chinese valet. The better informed said at once: "That's the valet," and expected nothing. But the inner circle expected a great deal.

"The evidence you shall give to the Court——" an usher began to mumble, giving Curtis a book.

"Stop," said the Judge. "He is not a Christian."

"Yes," Curtis corrected the Judge kindly.

"A convert?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Pallis Exhibition," said Curtis.

"What strange consequences the Paris Exhibition has!" said the Judge.

It was his first witticism of the day, and he was rather pleased with it, and with the answering snigger of the Junior Bar and the more diplomatic smile of the Senior Bar. But it was also nearly his last.

So Curtis was sworn as a Christian.

"Your name?"

"Curtis."

"I mean your real name."

"Curtis."

"That is not your real name?"

"Yes."

"Then what is your Christian name?"

"Curtis."

"I should explain to your lordship," said Florius, "that this man has always been called Curtis."

"Let us conform to precedent then," said his lordship, "and continue to call him Curtis."

Curtis smiled agreeably.

And the American reporter composed a heading: "Christian Chinee is too much for Judge and Counsel."

"Now," said Florius, K.C., "you were valet to the late Mr. Courlander?"

"Yes."

"On the night of his murder did you go to bed as usual?"

"Yes."

"Did you remain in bed?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I heard master's spillit."

"Explain what you mean?"

"Magic," said Curtis, simply, as though speaking

of scientific facts. "Master had a magic spillit. Magic! Magic!"

"Is my client," asked Lorimer, K.C., popping up again, "is my client to be convicted on this kind of evidence?"

"If my friend will kindly permit me to conduct my own case," said Florius, K.C., "perhaps time will be saved. Meanwhile let me remind him that as he is a member of the Society for Psychical Research, he ought not to object to spirits. We shall come to something less spiritual presently." And he turned again to Curtis. "Assuming that your master had a familiar spirit, how did you hear it? What was its voice like?"

"Bell," said Curtis.

"Ah! a bell. Where did you hear this bell?"

"In his loom!"

"You are sure it was not an ordinary bell?"

"Yes."

"Where did you sleep?"

"In a loom over my master."

"And you could hear the bell from your room?"

"Yes."

"Had you ever heard it while you were in your master's room?"

"Yes. Once."

"Was your master there?"

"No."

"What did you do?"

"Lun."

“You were afraid?”

“Yes. My master a gleat magician.”

“You heard a bell ringing when there wasn’t a bell  
—in the air?”

“It was the spillit speaking.”

“But on the night of the murder, when you heard  
your bell, what did you do?”

“Came downstairs.”

“You weren’t afraid then?”

“It lang three times—louder, louder. I could not  
be alone.”

“So you came downstairs?”

“Yes.”

“To your master’s room?”

“No.”

“Then why did you come downstairs?”

“Too high up.”

“What happened next?”

“I saw my master walking along the collidor.”

“Dressed?”

“Yes.”

“What time was that?”

“About a quarter to two.”

“You followed him?”

“Not quickly.”

“But you followed him?”

“Yes.”

“Where did he go?”

“Down into the gardens.”

“You continued to follow him?”

"No. I lost him."

"Then what did you do?"

"I walked in the gardens."

"You didn't at once go back to bed?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Afraid."

"Why?"

"Spillit spoke three times. Fate."

"Did you see any one in the gardens?"

"Yes. The German—electlic man."

"Anybody else?"

"Mr. Mollice."

"And then?"

"I went to hide till morning."

"Why?"

"Afraid of Mr. Mollice."

"Why were you afraid of Mr. Maurice?"

"His face. Talking to himself. Devil's face."

"Where did you hide?"

"In the cloak-loom."

"Off the hall?"

"Yes."

"Then?"

"At dawn I went to bed."

"Now I want you to tell the gentlemen of the jury exactly what happened when Mr. Maurice summoned you the next morning."

Curtis looked at the gentlemen of the jury with an air of wonder.

"Yes," said he. "Mr. Mollice told me my master killed. I said to myself: 'Good. You killed him. It is a secret. I have a new master.'" Curtis's smile remained of a fixed blandness.

"You thought Mr. Maurice had killed his father?"

"Yes."

"Why should he have killed his father?"

"Fate. I said to myself, 'It is appointed; spillit called thlee times.' I lemembredd his face in the gardens."

"What did he say to you?"

"He asked me if I had noticed anything unusual. I said 'No.' I said I had slept all the night."

"You lied to him?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"He my new master. It was not lawful that I should accuse my master. If the master kills the master, what is that to the servant?"

There was a silence.

The whole Court was fascinated by Curtis's changeless smile. A lady in a specially stylish bonnet fainted and was carried out.

"Oh!" said Florius, K.C., apparently at a loss to continue. Though he was perfectly acquainted with the evidence which Curtis had to give, the Chinaman's deportment and the Chinaman's morality were startling even to his variegated experience.

Suddenly Curtis grinned.

"When the German electlic man told me that he had seen Mr. Mollice in the gardens and that Mr. Mollice had qualleled with my master, I said to him he must tell no one. He said he had told the perleece. Then I say to him: 'If you do not leave England now, you die.' I tell him how Chinaman kills." Here Curtis twisted his face into something demoniacally terrifying. "He flightened! He goes. Nobody see him in England any more."

The next instant Curtis had resumed his simple smile.

"Do you still think that Mr. Maurice committed the murder?"

"No."

"Why?"

"He told me."

"Under what circumstances?"

"When I see him sad, velly sad, every day more sad, I say to him not to be aflaid, master. Servant knows, but will not tell. I say to him he is safe. He laughs. He calls me a fool. I was a fool."

"He convinced you, then, that you were mistaken?"

"Yes. When man lies, I know. When man speaks truth, I know. He tell me Mr. Clampiron killed my master; but no witness, no ploof. I say to myself: 'I will find ploof.' I go one night to Mr. Clampiron's house, one night when Mr. Clampiron not there, when Miss Norah not there. Like thief. I climb in. I find ploof in bedloom."

"What did you find?"

Curtis drew one hand from the sleeve and pointed to the desk in front of Florius.

“This?” said Florius, holding up the strange instrument.

“Yes.”

“Where did you find it?”

“Over door in bedroom. On ledge over door.”

“How came you to look there?”

“Look evelywhere till find.”

“Did you expect to find this?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“That belong to my master.”

“What is it?”

“I don’t know. Magic. My master tell me never to touch it. He hide it in drawer locked always. But after murder I open drawer and do not find it. I say to myself: ‘Master killed with that.’ I saw wound. Just fits; so nice! When I thought my master kill my master, I say to myself, ‘Mr. Mollice has that—that charm!’ But when I know Mr. Clämpiron kill my master, I say to myself: ‘Mr. Clämpiron have that charm.’ My master go out with that charm that night. Mr. Clämpiron snatches it”—here he made an abrupt snatching gesture—“and kills my master—so.”

The pantomime was so expressive that a shiver of horror ran through the Court. For many minutes the attention of the audience had been fixed with hungry and febrile intensity on the Chinaman. There

was a cracking sound of wood; people's muscles relaxed and tightened anew, and every one saw that Crampiron had sunk into a chair at the back of the dock. The sound had been caused by his convulsive grip of the wooden rail, to which his hand still held. Each separate feature of his face was moving in anarchy. Then, after a word from one of his guardians, he recovered command of himself and resumed his feet, outwardly contemptuous and calm.

All the reporters wrote: "Scene in Court."

And in every heart was the excited realisation of the fact that the trial was handsomely living up to its promise. The atmosphere created by the bland and bewildering Curtis had qualities of the uncanny quite peculiar to itself.

The Judge, having written the word "so," glanced at counsel with an air that was meant to be ironic. The Judge's one regret was that Curtis had made any display of judicial humour entirely impossible. Florius, K.C., had sat down. And Lorimer, K.C., had not risen for the cross-examination. The jury were whispering together wisely.

"The Chinaman's done for him!" was the general conclusion, in reference to the prisoner.

"Now, Mr. Lorimer," said the Judge, at length, "it's your turn." And he put a slight emphasis, that might have meant anything, on the possessive pronoun.

And Lorimer found his long, thin legs, and

gathered the tattered silk of his gown about his waist, as he always did before commencing work.

"How old are you, my man?" Lorimer began.

Curtis shook his head, smiling.

"How *old* are you?"

"I don't know."

"Do you mean seriously to tell his lordship and the jury that you don't know how old you are?"

"Yes," laughing.

"About?"

"About what?"

"About what age are you?"

"I don't know."

"Are you fifty?"

"I don't know."

"Answer the question," said the Judge briefly.

"Yes," said Curtis.

"Then you are fifty?"

"I don't know."

"Where were you born?"

"I don't know."

"I suppose you were born in China, somewhere?"

"Perhaps San Flancisco," Curtis hazarded impartially.

"Well, at any rate you state you are a Christian?"

"Yes."

"Yet you admit you lied to Mr. Maurice Courlander, and that you broke into the accused's house?"

"Yes, I am a Chlistian."

"And you seem to have little regard for human life. How is that?"

"I am a Chlistian," Curtis repeated, seemingly afraid lest Mr. Lorimer had not yet comprehended the assertion.

"When did Mr. Maurice Courlander tell you that he knew the accused to be the murderer?"

"It was the full moon."

"Which full moon?"

"The full moon," said Curtis; and threw a short glance at the Judge as though asking the Judge to let him know immediately if it was the proper thing to believe that the earth had two moons.

Mr. Lorimer sighed, weary.

"And how soon afterwards did you discover the—er—instrument?"

"Two days."

"To whom did you give it?"

"My master."

"Did Mr. Maurice Courlander give his reasons for his conviction that the accused had murdered his father?"

"No."

"And you did not ask him?"

"No."

"You had no curiosity?"

"Magic!" murmured Curtis, with a far-away look.

("Liar!" Maurice muttered to an astonished Parculier. "I told him why I knew. Why doesn't he say so?")

At one o'clock the Judge broke into the cross-examination.

"Shall you be much longer, Mr. Lorimer? If so, I'll adjourn at once for lunch. If not, I'll continue."

Lorimer hesitated a moment, and then said with a bored air: "I've done, my lord."

The Judge rose. Half the reporters made a simultaneous dash for the telegraph-office. Crampiron vanished below ground. In three minutes the Court was occupied only by one old usher, and two young married women who, having bribed him with smiles, were eating sandwiches there. Maurice and Berger were in a private room at the Unicorn, and the bars and coffee-rooms of the seventy and seven hotels in Bedford were busy as they had never been busy before. The Chinaman was on all tongues; the Chinaman had made a brilliant *début* in an English witness-box. People wondered where he lunched, and whether he ate lunch with chopsticks. But no one had the felicity of seeing him eat.

After lunch the Court was more than ever crowded. Carfax was called to give evidence. Sibthorpe had not been perceived anywhere. Carfax was accustomed to the scientific presentation of facts. In a few words he related how Maurice had handed him the curious instrument, and how, armed with a search warrant, he had visited Crampiron's bedroom and examined the ledge over the top of the door, and found minute traces of dry blood there, such as might have been left by the curious instrument.

The audience remarked that when Mr. Lorimer rose to cross-examine him, it was with a most cheerful demeanour.

“What date was this, Carfax?”

“I have looked at my diary, and at the almanac. It was on the second of August; and full moon was on the thirty-first of July.”

“Ah! Supposing I suggest that this instrument had been placed on the ledge over the door by Curtis himself? What should you say?”

“I should say that if Curtis placed it there he must have placed it there several weeks before his suspicions were directed to Crampiron.”

“Why?”

“Because the spot which had been occupied by the instrument was comparatively free from dust, whereas all the other part of the ledge was thick with dust. Moreover, there was much dust on the instrument.”

“Does it not strike you as extremely odd that the accused should have selected such a peculiar locality for hiding the instrument?”

“It strikes me as extremely clever,” said Carfax. “A better hiding-place could not have been chosen. Who would ever think of looking there?”

“Curtis thought.”

“He did.”

“What are you driving at, Mr. Lorimer?” inquired the Judge.

“I am driving at Curtis,” said Lorimer, K.C., “I mean to ask your lordship’s permission to recall him.”

"As you wish. But why?"

"Because during the luncheon interval I have had an analysis made, and I am in a position to prove that the dried blood on the instrument is no human blood but dog's blood."

It was a very pretty, dramatic effect that Lorimer, K.C., had obtained.

## CHAPTER XIV

### VERDICT AND SENTENCE

**O**N the morning of the trial of Abraham Crampiron at Bedford, there had occurred, in another place, a scene which was to react in the most extraordinary way in the Assize Court a few hours later. The other place was Lord Doncastle's private room in the Houses of Parliament. Lord Doncastle was enjoying his ordinary flute-practice (he kept, as is well known, a silver flute at Downing Street and a wooden flute at the House of Lords), while a secretary opened and sorted despatches. Or rather, Lord Doncastle was not enjoying his ordinary flute-practice. He seemed moody, and much less indifferent than usual. The fact is that the Prime Minister was disturbed about the Crampiron trial—he was very disturbed. Owing to the illness of the Sultan of Morocco, the financial transactions which were to save Morocco from ruin had been suspended. The Sultan was now better, and the affair, under the charge of Crampiron, who did not allow the accidents of private life to interfere with business, was resumed. But supposing that Crampiron were convicted, where then would the loan be, and where would be the English Government? The

failure of the loan would mean peace instead of war, and none knew better than Doncastle that a European war alone could save the ministry. Moreover, the conviction of Crampiron would in itself be a severe blow at the prestige of the ministry and of Lord Doncastle in particular. For had not Lord Doncastle offered him an earldom? Now a wise Prime Minister ought not to offer an earldom until he has assured himself that there is no fear of the recipient of the offer being executed for murder within the next three months.

Doncastle did not by any means think that Crampiron would actually be convicted and sentenced. The shocking death of his old friend Carl Courlander had been a great grief to him; but he believed positively that Crampiron was innocent. Doncastle's intellect was not simple; it was his soul that was simple. And Crampiron had somehow captured his soul, and had drawn to himself that sympathy which Lord Doncastle was as ready to give as he was to demand. Lord Doncastle deemed himself bound to Crampiron by sentiments of honour.

Hence his moodiness over the flute. He considered it almost certain that Crampiron would gloriously prove his innocence, but, on the other hand, there was just a chance that he might be condemned—the caprices of juries and the singularities of such judges as Walworth were incalculable. And Parliament was to meet in four days. Doncastle hated autumn sessions, but he had wasted so much time

splitting hairs during the summer session, that he had been compelled to yield to an influential autumnal call.

Lord Doncastle put his flute into its case, and then, the secretary not having finished the cutting of envelopes, he did a thing which he never did—that is to say, when he was sane. He picked up a newspaper. It was the secretary's newspaper, the *Daily Record* (the secretary was young). The *Daily Record* was full of the Crampiron trial, though when it had gone to press the trial had not commenced. And Doncastle, being quite unversed in the interpretation of newspapers, read its fifth page with all the trustfulness of a child who has never been deceived. He was unacquainted with the aims of the *Daily Record*, and the idealistic methods by which the *Daily Record* had obtained its vast circulation. He did not know that when the world-life of the previous twenty-four hours failed to reach the *Daily Record's* standard of interestingness, the *Daily Record* whipped it up to that standard. All he knew about the *Daily Record* was that its proprietor had once demanded a peerage, and got it. Among other items which Lord Doncastle perused was this, from the Paris correspondent of the *Daily Record*—

“I understand that Miss Norah Crampiron has died at Paramé, near Dinant. For some reason the death has been kept secret. But there is no harm in saying that my informant had the information on unques-

tionable authority. Miss Crampiron died from brain fever brought on by shock. I shall have all particulars to-morrow."

Doncastle instantly sat down and composed a letter of condolence—

"**MY DEAR CRAMPIRON,**" he wrote, "I cannot allow a moment to elapse without telling you how very sorry I am to hear of the death of your daughter at Paramé. I did not know even that she was ill. Please accept my sincerest sympathies, and my best wishes. I cannot, in my position, write to you as one private individual to another. But nothing shall or can prevent me from assuring you of my great sympathy with you in your bereavement.—Believe me, Yours most sincerely."

It was a bold letter for a Prime Minister to send to a man on trial for murder; but, whatever Doncastle's faults, he knew what courage was, and it was notorious that his conception of loyalty was well-nigh romantic.

As he was blotting the address on the envelope (a sinister address!) the Home Secretary, having knocked abruptly, came into the room. Mr. Bott, member for the Biggleswade division of Bedfordshire, was a Labour M.P., representing the agricultural interest. He was an earnest and very capable man, but the fact that he was the first Labour M.P. to

reach Cabinet rank had been perhaps a little too much for his balance. Moreover, as a son of toil in a blue reefer suit and a slouch hat, he could not help sticking out a defiant chin to the House of Lords even before the House of Lords had stuck out a defiant chin at him. He made a point of frequently bearding Lord Doncastle in his den, partly to prove to the pompous doorkeepers that a slouch hat was a hat for a' that, and partly to make it plain to Lord Doncastle that a Labour Minister was exactly as good as any other minister—if not better.

"I have only five minutes," he said, shaking hands.

"Oh!" said Lord Doncastle. "What is afoot today?"

"I have to open a Chrysanth Show."

"A what show?" questioned Lord Doncastle, unused to the abbreviations employed by gardeners and other agriculturists.

"A Chrysanthemum Show—at Bedford. I promised six months ago."

"My dear fellow," said Doncastle, "you can do me a service. Will you deliver this letter for me?"

Mr. Bott's state of mind when Doncastle called him his "dear fellow" was complex. He was flattered, and at the same time anxious to indicate to Lord Doncastle that if Lord Doncastle thought he could flatter him, Lord Doncastle was wrong. In short, Mr. Bott meant to be no one's dear fellow.

However, he took the letter, and when he saw the address, he lifted his eyebrows at Doncastle.

"Just hand it to the proper official," said Lord Doncastle, steadily. "If you are sure it won't be troubling you too much."

"Not at all," said Mr. Bott, whom Lord Doncastle's charming politeness always inspired to feats of politeness intended to be equally charming.

Mr. Bott reached Bedford, and opened the Early Chrysanthemum Show, which was a sad failure. He ventured to remark on the paucity of the attendance, and the reason was explained to him. He then remembered the letter with which he had been charged, and he suddenly decided that it would not be a bad thing for a Labour Minister to emphasise to the local mind his social and political importance by calmly going and taking a seat on the Judge's bench.

This he did, and in so doing taught ushers and beings higher even than ushers, that a Labour Minister is not to be trifled with. He gave the letter to the Judge's valet, with injunctions—the injunctions of the Home Secretary—that it should be handed to Crampiron at once. The Judge's valet rebelled inwardly, but yielded, as did also Justice Walworth himself when Mr. Bott, without having asked permission, invaded the sacred bench.

The appearance of Mr. Bott, occurring immediately after the dramatic announcement of Lorimer, K.C., that the blood on the mysterious instrument was dog's blood, added to the sensations of that crowded hour. Mr. Bott, having whispered a question or two to his lordship, set himself to listen.

"Now, Carfax," Lorimer, K.C., was drawling, "how was it that the police did not have the blood examined? Surely that was an elementary duty? It was, at any rate, a precaution which would have prevented you from raising a whole structure of so-called proof on a foundation of dog's blood."

"The police did have the blood examined," said Carfax, obstinately and quietly.

"By whom?"

"The experts of the Home Office."

"And what was the report?"

"That the blood was human blood."

"Well, your Lordship," said Lorimer, turning his gaunt face to the Judge, "I can put Professor Chant, F.R.S., of Bedford Technical College, into the box at once to prove that the blood is dog's blood. Shall I do so?"

"By all means," said his lordship, and then turned to Carfax. "Before leaving the box," the Judge questioned, "can you throw any light on this apparent discrepancy? And recollect, sir," the Judge added, "that it is not the business of the police, nor of the Home Office"—here he moved his head the tenth part of an inch in the direction of Mr. Bott—"to try to convict an accused person. It is their business simply to elucidate the truth. The police are apt to forget this—in their praiseworthy zeal, a zeal rare in the Civil Service?"

"I was about to say," said Carfax, who had no intention of being intimidated by a pompous bachelor

of sixty-five in a red gown, "that the instrument was mislaid by my immediate superior, and re-discovered only yesterday evening."

"Where was it mislaid?" asked the Judge.

"At Tudor Hundreds. When it was originally discovered, we took it away to London for examination. It was then brought down again to be placed once more on the ledge of the door by my superior himself, to reconstitute the prisoner's actions after his alleged crime. Subsequently we had a consultation at Tudor Hundreds, and it was only after our arrival in London that we discovered that the instrument was missing out of a bag. It was found by Mr. Maurice Courlander yesterday evening in a drawer in the room where the consultation was held."

"Your theory being that it had been left there accidentally?"

"Yes, my lord," said Carfax; and he stepped down without having made the smallest reference to the condition of fright and uncertainty into which the police and Maurice and all the forces ranged against Crampiron had been thrown by the losing of the instrument, or to the condition of joy and relief which had been induced in them by its fortunate recovery. As to what was the state of mind of the prosecution in view of Mr. Lorimer, K.C.'s, amazing announcement, the demeanour of Mr. Carfax gave no clue.

"H'm!" said his lordship. "Let Curtis be recalled."

Curtis was therefore recalled. But he was recalled

in vain. He refused to answer to his reiterated name; he persisted in remaining invisible.

In the meantime the Professor had given his evidence. He gave it with gusto, for it enabled him to refer to his recently published and epoch-making work on bloodstains, a work in which was set forth for the first time a method of distinguishing, one from another, the dried blood-corpuscles of nearly all the different vertebrate species.

It was at the precise moment when the Professor was leaving the box that the most dramatic incident of the day happened. A note had been handed by an usher to Lorimer, K.C. (the Judge's valet had not hurried over his task), Lorimer had handed it to one of the officials in charge of Crampiron. Crampiron tore it open. Every one witnessed the act. Mr. Bott saw that the authority of the Home Secretary had not been flouted. Then every one, including Mr. Bott, saw Crampiron sink to the ground in a swoon, softly and noiselessly as an inert body always falls.

And Mr. Bott wondered what trick Lord Doncastle had been playing on him, Mr. Bott.

When a doctor, having failed to restore Crampiron to consciousness by ordinary devices, had ordered his removal—it was strange how the centre of command shifted abruptly from the Judge to the commonplace general practitioner—the Judge rose and gruffly stated that the sitting would be suspended for half an hour at least, and departed. Mr. Bott remained.

Maurice, after lunch, had resumed his seat near Parculier, and as the Judge disappeared he said to Parculier—

“Think the thing will be over to-day?”

“No?” said Parculier positively.

“Then I shall go and send a telegram to my sister.”

With difficulty, and certainly not without drawing much attention to himself, he forced his way out of the building. Scarcely any one else save a few reporters of London evening papers moved. Conversation was free in Court, the Judge being absent, and the excitement caused by the strange hitch in the evidence for the Crown, and by Crampiron’s collapse upon receiving the mysterious letter, had full vent and license. Nobody was more exercised than Maurice by the utterly unforeseen turn of events. He, who knew more of the inner heart of the affair than any other person, was the most puzzled of all. At the moment, what chiefly and before everything else rendered him uneasy, was the absence of Curtis. He had distinctly told Curtis to be within call, and had, in fact, meant to send him to Tudor Hundreds with a message to Millicent.

“Please bring me a telegraph form and a whiskey and soda—Irish,” said Maurice to a waiter at the door of the private room which he had engaged at the Unicorn. The order was executed instantly. Maurice drank the whiskey and soda in two hasty gulps, and then he sat down to write the telegram to Milli-

cent. He could not decide what to say, and began to walk to and fro in the room, arguing whether he should or should not ask Emile to go over himself to the Hundreds for the night. It was an entirely ordinary sitting-room, and it communicated by means of an open door with a bedroom of similar ordinariness. Suddenly Maurice heard sounds of movement in the bedroom, where no one should have been, and he hurried to inspect.

He had the astonishing spectacle of Curtis emerging from beneath the bed.

“What the——?” he began angrily, and stopped. (But he was very content that Curtis was there, after all.)

“I was coming to you, sir,” said Curtis, simply, straightening his robes, and adjusting his pigtail and then his skull-cap.

“Where from?” Maurice demanded.

“From the bed,” said Curtis.

“I mean—where the devil have you been?”

“Hiding—here,” Curtis explained. “Better to hide. I was waiting for you, sir.”

“See here!” said Maurice. “Just make yourself plain, or we shall be likely to have difficulties.”

“Perleece!” said Curtis, with no advance towards intelligibility. “They will seek me soon.”

“Why?” Maurice asked. “What have you been doing?”

“Sit down, sir,” Curtis appealed. “You sit down. I tell you evelything.” And, persuasively advancing,

he wafted an unwilling Maurice back into the sitting-room.

"You'd better tell me quickly," said Maurice warningly, and sat down.

"I tell you, sir," Curtis repeated in a tone that was meant to fall like balm on exacerbated ears. "I explain to you. You will see clearly. When instrument lost by Mr. Sibthorpe, I say to myself that instrument stolen by Clampiron."

"How could it be stolen by Clampiron?"

"By somebody for Clampiron. By Beakbane, eh?"

A light seemed to break upon Maurice.

"Why didn't you tell me what you thought?"

"I never say what I think till asked. Servant. Servant not gabble. When instrument lost I say: 'How sad! How sad! This is the ploof and the ploof is lost.' Then one day"—he bent down and half whispered to Maurice—"I find another instrument in cupboard of master's loom. Ah!"

He drew back. He was really showing some sign of not being utterly indifferent.

"Then there are two of these things—these instruments?" Maurice cried.

The Chinaman nodded.

"Exactly alike?"

"Exactly alike," said the Chinaman gravely. "I had been wlong. I thought master had taken his instrument—charm!—when he went that night to meet fate in the gardens. I thought he was killed with his instrument. No! His instrument in loom all the

time. Two instluments. Exactly alike. I say to myself: 'What pity! How sad that the ploof is lost.' I say to myself: 'I will make new ploof.' I take one of Lady Mary's spaniels into shlubbery at night. I stick master's instlument into it, and I hold its mouth. Then I belly it. Then I dly blood on master's instlument, and I put it in dlawer in study. And I ask you if you have looked in all dlawers if Mr. Sibthorpe not left his instlument there. You look. You find. You have new ploof, like old. I say nothing. I say to myself: 'Master wants Clampiron hanged: I will do it.' "

"Am I to understand, man," said Maurice, "that you found another instrument the same as the murderer's, in my father's room?"

"Yes," said Curtis. "He had one. Clampiron had one—both same."

"And that you then, when the first one disappeared, deliberately killed one of my mother's dogs with the second one and let the blood dry on it, and then set a trap for me to find it, intending me to believe that it was the first?"

"Yes," Curtis amiably concurred. "But I did not know that Englishmen could know when dog's blood and when man's blood. Magic! English magic! When I heard that, I lan. Afraid! I lan here to wait till you came. Now you come. I have told you, sir."

"Well," said Maurice, "you've made an absolute mess of everything, that is what you have done.

You've been clever; but you haven't been clever enough. If you had stuck the instrument into the calf of your own leg, there would have been some sense in that; but now you've ruined all."

Maurice laughed bitterly. There was a humorous side to Curtis's magnificent disregard of everything save an end to be gained, and Maurice was obliged to laugh.

"My leg!" Curtis murmured. "Yes. But I did not know. Too late now!"

It was clear that, had it not been too late, Curtis would quite willingly have even cut his leg off in order to provide the missing proof necessary for Crampiron's conviction.

"Two instruments?" Maurice said in a low, reflective voice, forgetting for an instant, in his preoccupation with the central mystery, all the complications involved by Curtis's trick. "Curtis, you haven't by any chance found out what these cursed instruments are, or where they came from, or why my father had one and Crampiron the other?"

"No, sir," Curtis answered solemnly. "Magic! All that is magic!"

And he hid his hands in his wide sleeves. Maurice rose.

"I shall be put in prison, sir?" Curtis questioned.

"Why should you be?" said Maurice. "All you have to do is to keep quiet in the witness-box. If you don't give yourself away nobody can give you away. You say you have buried the dog?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Come along to the Court then, and persuade yourself that you know nothing. It should be perfectly simple to a man of your attainments."

And Maurice returned to the assizes, having forgotten the telegram to his sister. He could not be incensed against Curtis. Curtis had probably ruined the trial; but then, in the absence of any blood-stained instrument, the prosecution could not reasonably have dared to proceed with the trial at all. So that Curtis, if he had destroyed chances, had at any rate begun creating them. The solution of the enigma seemed to Maurice further off than ever, and as he followed its retreat in his mind, his interest in the trial itself seemed to wane slightly. He felt that new issues had been raised, owing to the fantastic trick of the bland Curtis.

He was late. The hearing had already been resumed when he entered the Court by way of the side-doors and the witnesses' room. The aspect of the chamber seemed to be completely altered, and the change bewildered him. Dusk was falling in the streets, and, within, the gas had been lighted, and its yellow glare smote an uneven sea of excited faces that were turned—not in the direction of the witness-box, but in the direction of the dock. There were three chandeliers, and one of them hung somewhat in front of the dock, strongly illuminating the haggard and drawn features of the prisoner and throwing a sharp shadow of him on the reporters' desk behind.

Maurice at the first glance imagined that he must be mistaken in thinking that Crampiron was in tears. He was not mistaken. The man's face was tremendously stern and set, but reluctant drops ran one after the other down those heavy cheeks. Crampiron was not speaking. Nobody, at the instant, was speaking. The Judge held up one hand in a deprecatory gesture.

Then the drawling voice of Lorimer, K.C., was heard:

"This being so," said Lorimer, "I will, with your lordship's permission, retire from the case."

"Yes," said Crampiron with a glance suddenly savage, "you may as well." And addressing the Judge and jury: "I plead guilty. I've had enough. No need for you to bother about what Curtis said and what Curtis did. I've had enough." And he almost shouted. "I can't stand it any longer. It makes no difference to me now whether I live or die. And, by heaven, I'd as soon die. Anything to avoid further effort! I've done with effort! I've just discovered that I've got nothing to live for, gentlemen of the jury. Yes, I killed him. Whether there's dog's blood or Courlander blood on that instrument, with that instrument I killed him, that night, under his cursed statue. So now you all know. Everybody may know." He became fiercely ironic, in his tears. "It'll make a pretty mess with the powers that be in this country, but I plead guilty to the wilful murder of Carl Courlander."

There was a pause. And even the greediest members of the audience perceived that they had got more sensationalism than they could comfortably swallow—one final and supreme thrill that was not precisely agreeable. Many could not bear even to look upon the agonised and tragic figure of Crampiron, with the glistening dew of an ineffable desolation on his white cheeks, there under the gas-rays. And all wondered what could have been in the note which he had received. None knew, none suspected; for Crampiron, since the arrival of the note, had spoken no word until abruptly he took his case out of the hands of Lorimer, K.C.

"You had better explain the circumstances to the jury," said the Judge.

"If any one in this Court," Crampiron replied with ferocity, "if any one in this Court supposes that he will persuade me to explain anything whatever, let him try—that's all. Explain! Why in the name of God should I explain? I plead guilty. What else do you want?"

His insolence was so overwhelming that it ceased to be insolence.

"I must warn you against gross contempt of Court," said the Judge stiffly.

Crampiron laughed, in his tears. "You can't hang me for three Sundays," he sneered. "If it amuses you to imprison me for contempt while I'm waiting, do so. That will be the crown of your reputation as a humorist, my lord."

"Terrible Duel between Prisoner and Judge," wrote the American special. Most of the other reporters had forgotten that they were reporters.

And when, after the brief formalities of spectacular justice, the jury returned a verdict in accordance with the prisoner's plea, and the Judge put on the black cap and cleared his throat, a large proportion of the public were so inconvenienced by their emotions that they would have given something considerable to quit the chamber of retribution. But they could not. It was as difficult to leave the Court as it had been to get into it.

"... And may God have mercy on your soul!" the Judge finished.

And then nothing was heard in Court but the low hissing of the gas-jets, and one sigh of relief. That sigh was Maurice's. Hazard had accomplished the justice which Maurice had sworn to obtain. In accomplishing it, however, hazard had afforded to the criminal an occasion to be heroic, and the criminal had audaciously seized the occasion. And in Maurice's sigh there was perhaps something else than relief.

The next moment Crampiron had been hurried downstairs by his keepers, to reappear no more in the sight of men. And as he took the dim passage leading towards the cells, he saw Norah standing to await him. The imperious and irresistible summons of instinct, the appeal of her blood, had brought her alone from her retirement in France to see her father. She

already knew the sentence; but she did not know that a few chance words of Maurice to the effect that Norah was dead to him, that for him she existed no more, had got twisted and magnified as they went from one mouth to another, and had at last, between the lips of a person talking to an enterprising newspaper correspondent, become crystallised into a definite untruth. She did not know that Crampiron in a supreme moment had realised that he cared for only one thing in this world—herself, and that, upon the staggering news that she had quitted it, he had decided to end the fight.

He stopped, and forced his keepers to stop.

Father and daughter gazed at each other in a unique and incommunicable despair.

“They said you were dead!” he muttered.

She did not grasp his words.

“I—I—came to see you.” Her girlish voice was a whisper.

He had to decide what to do, what attitude to take, what tone to adopt.

He threw up his head.

“Too late!” he replied with cold and proud benevolence.

And passed on.

## CHAPTER XV

### NO. 10 DOWNING STREET

No house in London—one may go further, and say no house in Bagdad—has more of the astonishing qualities of a surprise-packet than No. 10 Downing Street. It is an incomprehensible house, incomprehensible to those who live in it, and equally incomprehensible to those who do not. It is a mystery surrounded by mysteries. No. 11 Downing Street is the residence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. And a one-storeyed office has lately had the effrontery to call itself No. 12 Downing Street. But where are Nos. 1 to 9 Downing Street? No man knoweth. No directory saith. They are gone, like the famous public-house, The Cat and Bagpipes, which once stood at the corner of the street.

Why is it that a dark granite public passage, tunneled through the bowels of the Treasury, leads direct from No. 10 to the trackless freedom of the Horse Guards Parade? Why is it that a Prime Minister who chooses to stroll out of his official abode in his slippers of a night has instantly a view of the dark water of St. James's Park pond under the moon? These phenomena suggest conspiracies, attacks, es-

capes and suicides in a manner which does something to explain the high state of nervous tension in which Prime Ministers live. Why is it that No. 10 Downing Street is hemmed in on every hand by mighty and frowning edifices crammed with permanent officials—the permanent officials of the India Office, the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, the Treasury—whose presence must constantly remind a minister that a minister is mortal while a permanent official is eternal? Why does No. 10 Downing Street possess two front doors, one of which is never opened? Why is the front area so narrow that not even a milkman could get down into it? Why does the sole practicable front door have three bells, one above another, instead of two? Why are there flowers on the window-sills of the second floor, and none on the window-sills of the first floor? What is the secret significance of the square plates, bearing the cabalistic letters, "W. D.," over the semicircular windows of the east front? No answers have ever been returned to these questions, nor perhaps ever will be.

A more startling and yet more obvious query is: Why does the residence of the Prime Minister of the Kingdom resemble the dwelling of a retired grocer of simple tastes? The reply to this is forthcoming. It does not. It only pretends to resemble the dwelling of a retired grocer. No. 10 Downing Street begins to reveal itself as a surprise-packet when you have rung one of its three bells and persuaded its front door to open. You then discover yourself in an



"They said you were dead!" he muttered.



entrance hall whose mats, walls, and general shabbiness would be the instant ruin of a Bloomsbury temperance hotel, and you perceive that you have unwittingly done an injustice to the retired grocer. You decide that no grocer, at any rate no English grocer, would tolerate such a kennel.

But when you have penetrated a little further, and especially when you have mounted the first flight of stairs, you will be ready to remodel your views once again. Within thirty seconds you will have lost your bearings. Within sixty you will admit that you are in a palace, full of bewildering corridors and endless vistas of sumptuousness, with here and there a glimpse of some immense and stately apartment. No. 10 Downing Street begins exactly where you might have expected it to finish. Its ramifications are innumerable, its geography an enigma even to the most ancient janitor. It is so vast that none can say whether the Treasury is larger than No. 10, or No. 10 is larger than the Treasury. And no Prime Minister in a century and a half has been able to determine the exact point where No. 10 merges into the Treasury.

Certain it is that permanent officials, and the families of permanent officials, eat and sleep in private rooms of no mean splendour within the very walls of No. 10. As for doorkeepers, lackeys, and clerks, they pullulate, and incidentally bring up their children, in odd corners of the amazing and amorphous pile. Considered as a monument of the British tal-

ent for patching up and enlarging, the mansion is unique. It is also, after you have succeeded in forgetting its façade and its entrance hall, extremely impressive. A celebrated modern antiquary once made a serious attempt to master the intricacies of the house. He abandoned it, and has signed his name to an assertion that no one person is acquainted with every part of what is comprised in the single name—“No. 10 Downing Street.”

Three days after the trial and sentence of Abraham Crampiron, Lord Doncastle sat alone in the great drawing-room of No. 10 Downing Street. From the multiplicity of cushions and nooks and flowers in this noble chamber, it might have been imagined that the Prime Minister was a married man, or at least that he had a mother, a sister, or some more distant piece of femininity to act as chatelaine. Lord Doncastle, however, lived solitary in the state-rooms. When, on his assuming the direction of the realm, it had been pointed out to him that he could not entertain at Downing Street without a woman's aid, he had replied: “Why not?” And as nobody had been able to answer his question, he had proceeded to show to the members of the government, the circles of diplomacy, and the ruling families of England, that it was quite possible for the unassisted masculine to entertain beautifully.

The success with which he accomplished his rôle was due to a pretty taste in cushions, entrées, tea, blossoms, knickknacks, footmen, fire-grates, cosy-

corners, and toast. In refurnishing his own portions of No. 10, he realised at one stroke the ideals of a house-mistress and the ideals of a man of wide culture. The renowned portrait of Walpole over the drawing-room mantelpiece was well displayed against a Morris wall-paper; while underneath the latest pattern of well grate held the cleanest Wallsend coal. The rare Persian carpet was absolutely free from dust or wrinkles. The grand piano in the corner near the Corinthian pillar was a Steinway, and as to the cushions, it may be stated that there were thirty-nine in the drawing-room alone.

Lord Doncastle sat in the drawing-room because the whim frequently took him to work anywhere but in his study. With the blotting-pad on his knees, and a cake-stand that served to hold papers, and an exquisite purple dressing-gown cast negligently about his stooping shoulders, he loved to govern his country in a grandfather's chair at his drawing-room fire. That morning the governance of his country was giving him an immense amount of trouble. He felt, indeed, that his situation was excessively delicate, for too many persons were affirming too loudly that his country had had enough of him. Nothing but a strong sense that he and none other could ensure the salvation of his country in a parlous time prevented him from walking straight out of No. 10 Downing Street for ever. Parliament was to meet on the morrow, and he was by no means certain of a majority in either House.

And, more immediate, he had summoned a special Cabinet meeting for noon, and he had not decided precisely what course of action he should suggest to his colleagues in the painful dilemma in which he and they found themselves. Further, he had arranged a certain interview with a humble and yet a very important individual for eleven o'clock, and he was just acknowledging to himself that he could not even begin to devise his campaign until that interview was over. The clock which hid the lower part of Walpole's rich breast showed a quarter past ten, and the mirror at the other end of the room showed Lord Doncastle nibbling at a Faber H.B. pencil.

At this juncture in the history of the British Empire a footman entered the room and extended to Lord Doncastle a lady's visiting-card on a charger.

Lord Doncastle hesitated almost imperceptibly; then jumped up.

"Show her in," he commanded.

The instant the footman's back was turned he whipped off his purple dressing-gown, and, after a wild and fruitless glance round the room in search of a cushion large enough to hide it, he stuffed it under the grandfather's chair.

"How do you do, Miss Millicent?" he said, advancing with an easy grace towards the door which the footman had ceremoniously thrown open.

"It is very good of you to see me," Millicent replied, taking his proffered hand. She looked superb in her simple mourning, and nothing became her bet-

ter than the grave, gently sad, and invincibly determined expression which her pale face wore.

He indicated a large chair opposite his own, but Millicent preferred to take a tiny gilt chair that stood between the two.

"And Lady Mary—how is she?" asked Lord Doncastle.

"Poor mother imagines herself to be worse than she really is," said Millicent, calmly. "I told her this morning that she must get up and come downstairs and behave as though she was perfectly well. We have to resume our lives, you know, Lord Doncastle."

"You are very sensible, if I may say so," he concurred, with sudden admiration in his mild and winning voice. "When I think of all that you must have suffered during the—the——"

"Trial?" Millicent suggested.

"During the trial," Lord Doncastle proceeded firmly, "I can't find words to express the keenness of my sympathy with you all. I should have written to you, but really I've been so—however, I won't trouble you with politics."

He remembered that he had found time to write to Crampiron. But the recollection of his relations with Crampiron made him feel self-conscious in the presence of Millicent, and he therefore put them steadily aside. He had a convenient and almost miraculous gift of forgetting at will.

"This episode of our existence is over," said Milli-

cent. "But I do not believe in capital punishment. I never did. And I do not now."

"You don't?"

"I do not."

"Ah!" he murmured, gazing at the floor and perceiving a corner of his purple dressing-gown which peeped out from under his chair. "Neither do I," he said quickly and with eager conviction. "But your attitude is angelic—nothing less."

He looked up at her.

"Now, Lord Doncastle," Millicent began abruptly in a different tone, "I see from the *Times* that you have a Cabinet meeting to-day, and you must be very busy."

"Not at all," he protested. "I believe there *is* a Cabinet meeting——"

She smiled as she might have smiled at a child who was being naughty in a rather charming way. Her faint, tolerant smile said: "You really do carry your pretence of indifference too far sometimes. Why are you so absurd?" And he smiled in response, and his naïve, surrendering smile said: "You are perfectly right. But my instinct runs away with me. Forgive me. Besides, it doesn't matter."

And suddenly it appeared to him that they had never before been so intimate as they were then, and an agreeable, wistful melancholy stole over him as he surreptitiously suppressed the dressing-gown with his foot.

"I want to ask a favour from you," Millicent con-

tinued. "I've come up specially from home. But I won't keep you five minutes."

"My dear young lady," he replied with enthusiasm, "I am absolutely at your service—absolutely, entirely."

"Well," said Millicent, "I sent for Norah yesterday."

She seemed to wait for him to offer a remark. He made a movement as if to speak; then paused. He was wondering whether he ought to mention that he had, for a space of twenty-four hours, three days ago, believed Norah to be dead. He decided that the truest discretion would be not to mention the fact. He had no suspicion that his letter to Crampiron had changed the course of the trial.

"Norah Crampiron!" he ejaculated. "What a kind heart you have!"

Then she, in her turn, hesitated. Lord Doncastle, like the rest of the outer world, was not cognisant that Maurice and Norah were man and wife. Should she tell him? She decided not to tell him. If they once started a discussion of the situation as a whole, there would be no end to it. And Millicent was most anxious to keep on the level of the commonplace. She had the sagacity to perceive that the sole way to endure the irremediable poignancy of certain situations is the way of utter silence. One word, one single word, and the valve opens and you are lost!

"Not a bit?" A slight blush had come into her cheeks. "What have we against Norah? Poor child!"

On the contrary, it is on her behalf that I am here this morning. Do you know that that unfortunate girl is not allowed to see her father except under the most hateful conditions? When she told me the regulations of the prison I could scarcely believe it."

"I fancy the regulations of our prisons are still mediæval," said Lord Doncastle, impartially.

"What I want you to do is to have them relaxed in favour of Norah."

"I will do whatever I can," said Lord Doncastle. "The affair is in the Home Secretary's department but you may rely on me to do whatever I can." He spoke earnestly. He thought his attitude was unexceptionable; nay, that he was displaying more eagerness to serve her than Millicent could have anticipated. But he was mistaken.

Millicent leaned forward in her chair, and raised her gloved hands with a gesture that Lord Doncastle could not interpret.

"I don't remember," said Millicent, proudly, in her extraordinarily clear, precise enunciation, "ever asking a favour from any one before. But I decided last night that I would come up to town early this morning to ask this favour from you. And I've come. I'm here, asking you to do something for me. Won't you do it? Or shall I have to regret that I troubled you, that I took advantage of our friendship?"

"But, my dear young lady," Doncastle gasped, "do I not say——"

"I want you to understand"—Millicent stopped

him—"that the enterprise I have undertaken in coming to you is a very unusual one for me. I want you to understand that I have only undertaken it because I feel very, very deeply about Norah. I am so sorry for that poor child, that—that it is almost too much for me."

Doncastle felt to the full the emotional tension.

"I'll see Bott at once," he said. "I'll telephone——" He rose.

"See Mr. Bott?" she questioned coldly. "Why see Mr. Bott? You are the Prime Minister, aren't you? Your authority comes before the authority of Mr. Bott, doesn't it?"

There was one reply to make and Doncastle made it.

"It does," said he, sitting down, and gathering all his courage together to usurp the functions of Mr. Bott.

"Then will you kindly send a telegram to the governor of Bedford Prison," said Millicent, "in your own name?"

"I will," he agreed. "I'll send it this morning, without fail."

"Will you please send it now?" Millicent pursued.

"Certainly," he said, astounded at the influence of this young woman over him.

He picked up his blotting-pad, which was furnished with various pockets for various sorts of stationery, and drew out a telegraph form, and wrote with his quill pen.

"I will send this," he said: "Governor H.M. Prison, Bedford. Kindly allow Crampiron full liberty to see his daughter. Doncastle, Downing Street!"

"If you wouldn't mind adding: 'In private at any hour.'"

"With pleasure," Doncastle assented. And wrote, "In private at any hour of the day."

"It shall be sent off," he assured Millicent.

"I would like you to give it to me, and I will send it off," said Millicent.

At last, on this trifle, Doncastle revolted.

"I really cannot allow that," said he. "I should not forgive myself if I allowed that." He jumped up and rang a bell, and a valet entered. "Smithson," said he to the valet, "take this telegram to the post-office yourself, instantly, and then come back and tell me that you have sent it off."

"Yes, sir," said Smithson.

"Will that do?" Doncastle asked, with his beautiful smile, when Smithson had gone.

"I thank you," said Millicent, simply. "Do you know, I definitely promised Norah last night that I would get the regulations relaxed. I trusted to you."

"I am delighted that you did," Doncastle answered—"delighted!"

Now that she had swept him by the force of her will into a definite, prompt and slightly dangerous action to serve her, he experienced a most singular self-content. He was quite proud of himself.

There was a silence.

“She trusted to him.” As he thought of these words, and of the tone in which they were uttered, they affected him curiously and profoundly. She was an angel of mercy! She had the calm of a goddess, the loving-kindness of a mother, the intellect of a man. She was unique among women. She was the incomparable pearl. Never before had her merits so dazzled him. He told himself that he had always known, always clearly perceived, that she was the incomparable pearl. An enormous pity for himself filled his soul. He forgot the Cabinet meeting. He forgot the important interview which had to precede the Cabinet meeting. Politics seemed a ridiculous, unimportant toy. He thought only of the long vista of solitude which lay behind him, and of the long vista of solitude which lay before him. It was awful, awful! To have always a gracious woman in his rooms, to have this unique woman! To rely on her! To flatter her! To obey her! To sit opposite to her at breakfast, instead of sitting opposite to a secretary! What bliss!

He glanced round his drawing-room, of which he had been so proud. And it seemed to him a mere cold, masculine imitation of what Millicent would make it.

He approached her and stood over her.

“I would do anything for you,” he said softly. “I admire no one as I admire you. No one has such influence over me. I have never dared to—to——”

He took her gloved hand timidly.

"Don't, Lord Doncastle," she reproached him, with her calm of a goddess; and withdrew her hand. The gesture was final.

When she had gone, he sighed.

"It's just as well," he murmured to himself. "Just as well."

And he glanced round the room and rediscovered his pride in it. He felt he could not have borne to see a woman meddling with his cushions—not even the incomparable pearl.

The amorous crisis had been as brief as it had been violent and sweet.

"Mr. Beakbane, sir," said the footman.

"Show him in. No, I'll see him in my study. No, I'll see him here. Take out this dressing-gown, please." He pushed aside the grandfather's chair and exposed to view the purple garment.

## CHAPTER XVI

### RISE AND FALL OF BEAKBANE

**I**F Mr. Beakbane was nervous, Mr. Beakbane had ample excuse for his nervousness. It is not every morning that even a Beakbane gets a message, by special messenger, from the Prime Minister of the nation, containing a request—a request, not a command—for immediate attendance at the Prime Minister's official residence. Beakbane received the pleasing shock just after he had arrived at the Crampiron offices in Clement's Lane for a day's work in connection with Crampiron's affairs. “I've just had a note from Doncastle, asking me to go and see him at once,” said he to the chief cashier, with whom he happened to be talking. “Doncastle?” said the chief cashier, at a loss. “Yes, *Lord* Doncastle, the Prime Minister. By the way, what's his number, 10 or 12? This letter is written on Foreign Office paper.” The anarchical confusion which reigned in the chief cashier's mind, as it reigned throughout the Crampiron offices during those unexampled days, was much increased by Beakbane's announcement. And for a few moments the chief cashier had wild thoughts of flitting unostentatiously to Valparaiso with a

hundred thousand pounds of negotiable securities upon which he knew he could lay his hands.

Beakbane, tearing the paper sheaths from his cuffs, called aloud for a cab, rushed out, jumped into it, and drove to his rooms in Golden Square, where he changed all his clothes—that is to say, all of them that would be visible to the eye of a Prime Minister. He chose a waistcoat and a necktie with care and infinite audacity. Happily the inclemency of the November weather permitted him to assume his furs.

“Eleven o’clock, he says, doesn’t he?” he murmured, consulting the note when the toilette was complete. “I’m too early.” He hesitated and glanced in the mirror. Then he took off his furs, took off his frock-coat, took off his fancy waistcoat, took off his crimson tie; put on a bright green tie, put on a different fancy waistcoat, put on his frock-coat, put on his furs.

And he went forth into Piccadilly Circus, and down Charing Cross and Whitehall.

He did not know which of the three bells to ring at No. 10, so he rang them all. It was his furs that gave him confidence. His furs always gave him confidence. He at once perceived that he was expected. The respectful footman who received him from the hands of the respectful doorkeeper showed a desire to relieve him of his furs. But Beakbane haughtily declined. He would as soon have entered Doncastle’s drawing-room naked as without those furs.

“Good-morning, Mr. Beakbane,” Doncastle began,

actually stepping off the hearthrug to greet him, and shaking hands just as though he and Beakbane had been at Eton together. “I’m so much obliged to you for coming. Won’t you take your coat off?”

It was astounding. Mr. Beakbane’s heart boiled with rage against an Opposition that were on the point of turning such a man out of office.

“Not at all, sir—my lord,” he stammered. “Happy to make your acquaintance.”

And he negligently shed his coat, throwing an auctioneer’s gaze round the room as he did so. The room did not intimidate Beakbane, habituated as he was to the magnificence of a Carl Courlander. Indeed, the room disappointed him. He wished that he had not said: “Happy to make your acquaintance,” for he had previously met Lord Doncastle at Tudor Hundreds, though in a purely clerical capacity.

“Now, Mr. Beakbane,” said the Premier, when they had sat down, “I am going to treat you confidentially. I feel sure I can rely on your discretion.” And he offered to Beakbane the gift of one of his winning smiles.

“Absolutely, my lord,” said Beakbane, crossing his legs, and feeling with his left hand to make sure that his necktie was precisely where it ought to be.

“You must have been as surprised as I was at the verdict,” Doncastle went on.

“The verdict? Oh, yes, sir, I was horrified, horrified! I need not say that if I had had the slightest

suspicion of the truth, I should never have offered my services to Mr. Crampiron. Never!" Mr. Beakbane displayed heat. "Of course, when Mr. Maurice decided to wind up the Courlander business, there were very few situations which I should have cared to accept. I might have retired. I had serious thoughts of retiring. But as Mr. Crampiron approached me and made me a very brilliant offer, I closed with him. But naturally I had no idea—no idea!"

"Just so," said Doncastle, playing with a cushion. "We none of us had any idea, I'm afraid. But, Mr. Beakbane, now that we *have* an idea, we must not let our idea run away with us. A righteous horror of a dastard's crime fills your breast, Mr. Beakbane, at the present moment, and your sentiments do you credit, if I may say so. But nevertheless we must regard the affair with a broader outlook. Sacrificing our personal feelings, Mr. Beakbane, we must consider the matter from the point of view of the welfare of the Empire."

"Certainly, my lord," Beakbane concurred, wishing that he could talk like Lord Doncastle. "The welfare of the Empire."

"Vast interests are at stake," said Lord Doncastle, "and we must not permit our indignation against Crampiron to endanger those interests. Now what is going to happen to the business—Crampiron's business, I mean?"

"Well, sir," said Beakbane, suddenly deciding to conceal nothing from his friend Doncastle, and speak-

ing in a very low and confidential voice, "if you ask me, I really don't know."

His manner intimated that if any one could know, he would know.

"There have been no instructions?"

"None, sir. Mr. Crampiron refuses to see any one except Miss Norah—I should say Mrs. Maurice."

"What do you mean?" cried Lord Doncastle.

"Didn't you know they were secretly married?"

"Oh, yes," said Lord Doncastle, calmly; "I wasn't quite following you." There were moments when Doncastle was great, and this was one of them. Only a man of surpassing skill in certain directions could have concealed the mental turmoil which Beakbane's news had caused in him. How that minx, Millicent, had deceived him!

"Of course Mr. Crampiron has never been the same man since his daughter left him. He tried to get her back when she left Mr. Maurice." (More news for Doncastle!) "And I'm told—I'm *told*, mind you, sir—that he only pleaded guilty at the trial because some one had told him that his daughter was dead. It was in the *Record*. I daresay you saw it, my lord."

Lord Doncastle rose suddenly and walked about the farther end of the room, between the two Corinthian pillars, his hands behind him, his eyes on the ground. Beakbane perceived at once that this was exactly what a Prime Minister must do while in the act of deciding

the destinies of the Empire; and he respectfully and proudly waited.

The statesman came towards him.

"You are inclined to think that, had it not been for this false report, Crampiron would have fought his case to the end, and perhaps got off?"

"Precisely, my lord. I should say he much regrets his confession."

"You would?"

"I should, my lord."

"But about the conduct of the business, my dear Mr. Beakbane," Lord Doncastle cooed. "I imagine the effect on the City will be rather disastrous if nothing is done."

"The effect already is disastrous," said Beakbane, solemnly. "But what can I do? Nothing. Nothing can be done until after—the execution. Then, and not till then, my lord"—Beakbane shook a finger—"some power will be vested in his daughter—at least I presume so—and we shall know where we are."

Doncastle nodded several times, as if complimenting Beakbane on his remarkable grasp of the situation.

"Then I understand," said he, "that nothing is being done in the office?"

"Nothing but routine work. Why, sir, we can't even get a cheque signed!"

"Really?" said Lord Doncastle, sympathetically. "Then the Moroccan loan is at a standstill?"

"Yes, my lord."

"But you are familiar with all the details?"

"I think I may say so, my lord."

"Supposing that I obtained a power of attorney from Crampiron," Doncastle said in an entirely new tone, "do you think, Mr. Beakbane, with your vast experience, you could conclude the affair."

"A power of attorney in my favour?" asked Mr. Beakbane, faintly.

"Yes."

What a chance for Mr. Beakbane! But the ineradicable craven in him would not let him seize it. He had no genuine confidence in himself; he had confidence only in his fur coat.

"Do you suppose that you could get a power of attorney, sir?" he fenced.

"I say—assuming that I could," Doncastle replied with a touch of coldness, just the least touch of coldness, that took Beakbane in the spine.

"You see, sir," said Beakbane, "it isn't as if Berlin was united now in the affair. Mendelssohns are dead against it—and——"

"I am fully acquainted with the opposition of Mendelssohns," said Lord Doncastle. "Then you do not think you could manage it?"

"N—no, sir," Beakbane admitted. Then, to cover his retreat, he burst out with emphasis: "There is only one man in England who could finish up the Moroccan loan, my lord, and that man is Crampiron."

"I am very much indebted to you," Doncastle smiled, holding out a hand.

And almost before he was aware of it, Beakbane was being persuaded out of the drawing-room by the respectful footman who had offered to take possession of the furs.

The next person who entered did so without the slightest formality: a tall, clean-shaven, spruce, correct, upright man, of uncertain age, in a grey coat and yellow gloves. This was Doncastle's cousin, the Viscount Somersetshire, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and a Cabinet Minister. He was, socially, perhaps the most brilliant of the expiring glories of the English aristocracy. He had got himself into disfavour with his caste by producing a really scholarly edition of Shelley, but had regained his position by winning the Derby with a horse that started at thirty-six to one against. He was Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster because a Viscount Somersetshire had to be something.

"Well, Georgie, my poor boy," he greeted Lord Doncastle, throwing two cushions out of a chair and plumping down in it, "I suppose it's UP? I suppose there's nothing for it but for us to give the British Empire a rest. What I want to know is, are salaries paid up to the end of the current quarter? It means a monkey to me, you know."

Lord Doncastle stared at him blandly.

"Are people really talking about resignation?" he demanded with that air of ignorant and innocent simplicity which invariably indicated that Lord Doncastle had conceived some utterly astounding course

of action, and that he would exhibit the extremest surprise if the said course of action was not regarded as the only course of action, the most ordinary and commonplace course of action, in the world.

"People are talking about nothing else, Georgie," said Somersetshire. "Now, out with it! What have you got up your sleeve? You always confide in your sympathetic relative—the one man in England who understands you!"

"I'll tell you," said Lord Doncastle. "But not here. Come to my study. We've just got a quarter of an hour."

## CHAPTER XVII

### FEVER IN THE TRIANGLE

ON the same morning an evening paper, the *City Gazette*, which during a number of years had gradually established a reputation for startling announcements that, after being flatly contradicted, were admitted to be accurate, came out half an hour earlier than usual, that is to say, at half-past eleven. Mr. Beakbane saw the poster as he emerged from Downing Street into Whitehall. The poster said:

*“Immense Withdrawal of Gold from England by  
a Foreign Power. Special.”*

Mr. Beakbane tendered a penny to a newsboy who was wearing the poster like an apron and hoarsely shrieking: “*City Gazette. Special!*”

“Twopence, sir,” said the newsboy. “It’s my last.”  
And Mr. Beakbane paid twopence.

When a newspaper really has found an item of first-class thrilling news, the air of Central London instantly becomes quick with excitement, and everybody knows by a sort of instinct that the thrill is genuine. And the price of that newspaper goes up

to the full height of the newsboy's fancy. It has been known to rise to eighteenpence. But the fact that Mr. Beakbane paid twopence for a penny sheet is a fair indication that the impulse to buy was no ordinary one.

On the news page of the *City Gazette*, in great-primer Devinne type (the historic type used by the *City Gazette* when, thanks to its relations with a German butler, it was able to predict the fall of Bismarck) were printed the following lines:—

“We are in a position to state that France has just withdrawn, or is about to withdraw, a very large sum in gold from the Anglo-Scottish Bank, Lombard Street. It has of course been a matter of common knowledge in financial circles that the French government has kept a deposit account with our principal joint-stock bank for many years past, but the extent of that account was a secret between the Anglo-Scottish and its client. We may say that the sum withdrawn is between three and four million sterling. The notice of withdrawal caused the greatest surprise to the directors, who consider that the bank has scarcely been treated with consideration. No doubt France has an imperative reason for her action. What that reason is will be apparent to every one. We need not insist on it. Nor need we enlarge on the very serious dislocation of the money market which this immense withdrawal of gold must necessarily cause.”

It was decidedly an item to furnish food for thought. It was so important that all the other evening papers were obliged to copy it, giving, much against the grain, due acknowledgment to the *City Gazette*.

The offices of the *City Gazette* were in Whitehall; no doubt for the same reason that the offices of the *St. Stephen's Gazette* are in the City. But the news travelled to the city in pony-carts that rivalled the speed of fire-engines, and on bicycles whose swift riders daily risked their limbs for wages that a hall-porter would disdain. It arrived in the City long before Mr. Beakbane. It upset the Triangle. It pretty nearly stopped work in the Triangle for the day. The cup of the Triangle, already brimming, ran handsomely over, and everybody got his feet wet with the waters of apprehension and woe.

In the parlour of the Bank of England, twenty-six persons were known to be sitting at a table behind a guarded door. These were the governor and the deputy-governor and the twenty-four directors of the Bank, and the occasion was the ordinary weekly meeting of the Board. But the weekly meeting of the Board of the Bank of England is never ordinary. Too much depends on it; the Bank rate depends on it; the currents of money throughout Europe depend on it; contangoes depend on it; motor-cars and dinners at the Savoy depend on it; the satisfaction or the denial of the caprices of women depends on it. It is a solemnity whose fresh-

ness the ages cannot stale. By noon people of relatively minor, but still great importance, are always to be seen gathering about the forbidden doors of the sacred parlour, eager to snap up the first hint of a decision. With a minute's start a man of brains might turn the decision into money that would cover a seraglio of odalisques with pearls. If the meeting of the Board is prolonged after one o'clock, the Triangle grows uneasy; if it lasts till half-past one the Triangle gets nervous, under the fear that a great change is impending; if it passes two o'clock there is the inception of a scare; so curiously constituted is the English money-market. Were that convocation of babbling old men and respectful young ones to continue for four hours, the Exchanges of the whole world would lose their presence of mind and every value tumble down like the mercury before a storm.

On the day of Mr. Beakbane's interview with the Prime Minister, no sensible man in the Triangle expected the meeting of the Board to conclude earlier than half-past one, or a quarter to two: the Board had too much to do. And yet no principal would go to lunch; none would go out of reach of his telephone. The Stock Exchange was a restless and howling ocean of silk hats. Under nothing but the pressure of that vast withdrawal of gold, the Bank rate must go up. But there were other things to send it up. The bill-brokering side of the Triangle had been thoroughly disorganised by the abrupt closing of Courlander's.

Moreover, the house of Crampiron did an enormous business in three-month bills. The Triangle had soon recovered from the sensation of Crampiron's condemnation to the scaffold, but it had at least assumed that Crampiron was financially above suspicion. And yet now, there were little tricklets, little runlets, faint zephyrs that scarcely fanned the cheek—rumours that touched the stability of Crampiron's as a concern. There was, further, and still more urgent, the political situation of the country, the plight of the government, and the maddening haziness of Lord Doncastle's intentions.

At half-past one o'clock one of those things happened that can only happen in the Triangle. A statement suddenly sprang up from somewhere to the effect that a certain firm had been to the Bank of England that morning and asked for an advance on admittedly first-class security and been refused. Within a quarter of an hour that statement was known in every alley in the Triangle, and the storm in the Stock Exchange had burst. Such a statement knocks like death at the heart of every man in the Triangle, for it can only mean one thing. It can only mean that something is wrong, something that no one had been suspecting. The Triangle had suddenly a terrible thirst for gold. It had the fatal itch to realise its securities and be on the safe side. All stocks and all shares dropped. Consols dropped two points in twenty minutes. Kaffirs slid away into the depths, and Home Railways followed them—retain-

ing, however, their dignity. Values, as a whole, showed a depreciation of many millions.

Rumours were born and grew up to maturity every moment that France had declared war on Germany; that Germany had declared war on France; that the Anglo-Scotch was going to close its doors; that four discount houses were in difficulties; that seven unblemished stockbrokers had intimated the worst to their friends; that Crampirons wouldn't pay sixpence in the pound; that Lord Doncastle had resigned, and that the King had sent for the leader of the Opposition; that the Labour Party would have a majority in the next Parliament; that Canada had received a tempting offer from the United States; that Johannesburg was going to cut the painter, and finally, that the Russian Duma had been blown up in full session by a party of Cossacks out for the day. And prices went on falling. All the sea-cables that radiate from the island over the earth were busy with columns of figures headed by the fact that the London Stock Exchange, the calmest Stock Exchange in existence, had lost its head. It was nine o'clock in the morning in New York; New York left its breakfast. In San Francisco it was only six o'clock; San Francisco got up.

One word alone could describe the state of the Triangle: panic.

And the Board of the Bank of England still sat in its mysterious conclave. The hands of the pneumatic clock in front of the Mansion House were approach-

ing three, and yet the Parlour had not opened its doors. And in all the restaurants of the Triangle, fat men-cooks dressed in white were standing idle between silver grills and mountains of raw chops and steaks, waiting for regular customers who did not come.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CABINET

“**W**HAT are the agenda of this meeting?” asked the aged Lord Riach, Lord President of the Council, in his vibrating treble, as he hobbled to the marble fireplace over which hangs the old Dutch portrait whose authorship has puzzled generations of dilettante Prime Ministers.

“Short and simple as the annals of the poor,” replied Lord Doncastle, affectionately taking the gnarled hand of the antique Scotch peer. Half a century earlier, in the days when Edinburgh *was* Edinburgh, and Glasgow a dirty little industrial townlet, Lord Riach had been a dog, over the border.

“The question before your lordships,” laughed Somersetshire, “is merely whether we shall present ourselves with the sack, or wait till it is given to us.”

Lord Riach cackled. He had been impolitely offered many sacks in his time.

Cabinet meetings have been held in various parts of the country; in the Cockpit, in the old Foreign Office, in the new Foreign Office, in the garden of No. 10 Downing Street, in the chamber known as the Deputation Room in the same house; one was even held on a notorious occasion at Bertram Currie’s private

house in Combe Wood. But Gladstone, until he grew too deaf to catch from one end of the long table what was said at the other, had always held them in the stately apartment where Doncastle's ministry was now assembling, and Doncastle loved to imitate Gladstone in everything save his mastery of detail. Therefore Doncastle had restored the historic "Cabinet Room," and the long table thereof, to their ancient functions. The fact that he was not compelled to put on his boots in order to pass from his private den, by the famous long corridor sacred to ministers, to the supreme pow-wow, had perhaps influenced his choice.

It was a fine room—a worthy setting. A double pair of pillars, even more Corinthian than the pillars in the drawing-room, divided the entrance from the room itself. Bookcases full of impressive tomes rose round the walls to a height of about seven feet, and above these were plain white panels reaching to a chaste pale cornice. On the mantelpiece was a bracket clock flanked on one side by an empty letter-rack and on the other by a vase containing nine paper spills. At the extreme edge of the mantelpiece was a framed photograph of Windsor Castle, placed there casually, like the spills, for some undiscoverable purpose. A fire of Wallsend fizzed in the grate, and a Chippendale fire-screen had been pushed aside in front of a bookcase, where it hid from view fifteen volumes of *State Trials*. Affixed to the summit of the same bookcase was a map of the world with the British

Empire blushing like a rose thereon. Lord Doncastle, approaching this map, touched the spring of the roller, and the British Empire shot up out of sight with a snap! A symbolic action! The chairs were padded as though they had been the chairs of a mad-house. In the centre, under a small chandelier, was the long table, full of pens and blotting-pads upon which statesmen might wreak their nervousness or their boredom. Also on the table were the plate of captain's biscuits and the carafes of filtered water which a sagacious people allows for the sustenance of its rulers during their confabulations. And at the corner of the table was an electric deck-lamp, the wire of which wandered away in easy coils to a switch near the window. The window overlooked the autumnal browns of the Cockpit garden.

The Right Honourable the Earl of Munster, K.T., the Lord Chancellor, came in bearing a marked resemblance to a man-about-town. And he was followed by Mr. Luck, the First Sea Lord, and Sir Lionel Snow, Foreign Secretary, arm-in-arm. The Duke of Salop, who had been made Postmaster-General because there is less scope for blundering in the Post Office than in other departments, arrived in the old clothes which were the despair of his seven married daughters. And immediately afterwards, like a remedial measure, appeared the sprightly Marquis of Wym, the greatest dandy in English history. The Marquis was reported to spend four hundred a year on linen, and never to wear a pair of trousers twice; the

raiment which he cast in twelve months would have clothed the nakedness of a Duke of Salop from the beginning of the Christian era to the dawn of Tory democracy. When dressed for the morning he was Lord Privy Seal. One or two minor ministers who had only scraped into the Cabinet by the skin of their teeth, strolled in, and then Lord Doncastle glanced at the clock, which had just struck, and said—

“Are we all here?”

He well knew that they were not all there.

“Where’s Mr. Bott?” asked some one.

“Oh! Confound Bott!” exclaimed the Duke of Salop, testily. “I’ve got to be at my tailor’s at half-past one.”

Everybody was thunderstruck. The spectacle of Salop going to his tailor’s was one to give pause to the least reflective. Nobody had ever suspected that he had a tailor.

“By the way, who is your tailor, Duke?” Somersetshire irreverently demanded.

And the Duke gazed at Somersetshire sternly: “What the devil has that got to do with you, young man?” he retorted.

“I am sure that none of us would wish to keep his Grace from his tailor,” observed Lord Doncastle suavely, “unless the interests of empire make such a course imperative. Let us begin.”

“Yes,” put in Sir Lionel Snow. “But where’s Prester John?”

Sir John Prester, commonly called Prester John by

his intimates and his extreme enemies, was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and lived next door. His absence was therefore the less excusable.

"He will be coming directly," said Doncastle.

And Doncastle took the armchair at the head of the table, and the rest sat down, in attitudes more or less easy. It was a melancholy gathering, and a short-tempered, an anxious, a timid; a gathering satiated with power and yet terribly hungry. Each blamed the other, and all blamed Lord Doncastle, whose intentions none could pretend to know. In every breast was a smouldering fire of recrimination which the slightest breeze would fan into a horrid flame.

"What's this canard that the *City Gazette* is calling for a penny?" the Marquis of Wym asked in a low tone of his neighbour.

"It isn't a canard," the Foreign Secretary called out from across the table. "It's quite true. And I'd give a clerk or so to the lions to know how they got hold of it."

"What does it mean then?" the Marquis persisted.

"Gentlemen," Doncastle demanded their attention, politely but firmly. He turned to Snow. "Sir Lionel," he said, "what have you to report from Sandringham?"

Sir Lionel was that week the minister in attendance upon the King. He had come to town for the day.

"In two words," replied Snow, "there is a desire, a clear desire, that we should remain where we are. It is considered——"

And the Foreign Secretary proceeded to detail a conversation of the kind which never by any accident gets into the newspapers.

“I was requested last night, in the billiard-room,” Sir Lionel went on, “after the Portuguese Minister had given me thirty in a hundred and run out in three breaks, to outline my own scheme, and I stated plainly that the best thing, in my opinion, would be a really popular measure, such as Old Age Pensions.” Here several men groaned under their breath, for the Foreign Secretary was notorious for his Old Age Pensions. “If we bring in such a measure, the Opposition is bound to oppose it. Let them. Let us allow ourselves a tactical defeat. We can then go to the country with a good cry, and win on it handsomely.”

“And then forget all about Old Age Pensions,” Mr. Luck interjected.

“Or pass a very modified measure,” said Sir Lionel calmly.

“No Government to which I have the honour to belong,” said the Duke of Salop, drily, “will father any scheme for pauperising the proletariat at my expense.”

“Eh?” snarled the aged Riach, cocking an ear. “What about the expense of commissariat?”

“No Government to which I have the honour to belong,” the Duke shouted, “will father any scheme for pauperising the proletariat at my expense.”

“But you won’t mind the proletariat pauperising

you with a couple of thousand a year or so when you retire, Salop!" Lord Riach cackled.

No one laughed.

"Of course you informed His Majesty that France was making every effort to arrange a loan on her own account to the Sultan?" Doncastle questioned Sir Lionel with undiminished nonchalance.

"I did."

"Is that the meaning of this withdrawal of three millions?" asked the Marquis of Wym.

Mr. Luck, who, although he was in charge of the Admiralty, really understood financial questions, looked pained. "No," he said. "The three millions are being withdrawn as a precaution in case of war with Germany—a precaution which, I imagine, will prove unnecessary."

"You think so?" Doncastle smiled.

"Yes," said Mr. Luck. "What chance is there of a war now?"

"There is every chance," replied Lord Doncastle, gazing round the table. "I fancy I may say that, in certain circumstances, a war must come about. And"—he paused impressively—"if a war comes about we shall be sure of a majority."

Something in his tone gave hope to the hopeless, and every eye was fixed on him, except the eye of Lord Riach, who thought that ministers were still trifling away time on the proletariat.

"I should like," said Lord Doncastle, "briefly to resume the facts."

Absently he broke a captain biscuit.

And as he was doing so, Mr. Bott, Home Secretary, matrially entered, wideawake in hand. The man had actually forgotten to leave it with the servants in the anteroom.

Although this was his seventeenth Cabinet Meeting, it was the first at which he had been late, and he could not contrive to take his place without self-consciousness, especially as his movements were watched in absolute silence.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he said, putting his hat under his chair. "I am very sorry to be late, Lord Doncastle," he raised his voice. "But I was detained at the last moment by an enquiry from Bedford as to whether a telegram just received at the prison there, and purporting to be signed with your name, was genuine."

"It was," admitted Doncastle, blandly.

"I regret," said Mr. Bott, "that at a time when your lordship must be particularly busy with your own department, you should have been troubled to take charge of mine."

Mr. Bott was obviously furious. He glared defiance at the congregated aristocracy of the kingdom.

"No trouble, I assure you," answered Lord Doncastle with exquisite calm. "It was a minor but rather pressing point about a condemned man having access to his daughter, and as there was no opportunity to consult you instantly, Mr. Bott, I ventured——"

"The thing is of no importance," retorted Mr. Bott. "Feeling sure that the telegram was a practical joke on some one's part, I wired that no special privileges were on any account to be given to Crampiron."

Lord Doncastle bit his lip.

"But naturally I will telegraph fresh instructions," Mr. Bott added, afraid of his own audacity.

"You will be very kind," Lord Doncastle murmured.

"Crampiron!" ejaculated the Lord Chancellor. "By the way, Mr. Bott, I compliment you on your originality in taking a seat beside my old friend Walworth at Crampiron's trial; but, having regard to the previous close relations of Crampiron with the Government, the great and good public may judge your action in an unfriendly spirit. I saw yesterday that the *Times* very rudely described it as a lack of tact."

"Not such a lack of tact as offering Crampiron an earldom after he had committed a murder," Mr. Bott flashed back, aiming at Doncastle and hitting him full between the eyes.

"That is scarcely a fair way of putting it, you know," Somersetshire drawled.

Lord Doncastle made a gesture enjoining silence on his cousin, and proceeded with his statement. "I was just resuming the facts of the situation, Mr. Bott," he said with fine equanimity. "I think it is no exaggeration to say that, after I had arranged with

Crampiron to take Mr. Courlander's place in floating the Moroccan loan through Germany, our position, the position of our party, was assured. War between our friend Germany and our friend France was a certainty. We had, therefore, nothing to fear. Even when Crampiron was accused, and arrested; even when the Sultan fell ill and delayed everything, we still remained fairly safe, for the loan was in good hands. But the conviction and sentencing of Crampiron have brought us within sight of disaster. We are identified with Crampiron. His shame is ours. I have made careful enquiries, and ascertained that no other person but Crampiron could carry through the loan with sufficient quickness to forestall our good friend France. War is therefore indefinitely postponed, to my intense regret. I say 'to my intense regret,' because, as I cannot too often reiterate, a European war is our only chance for continuing to hold the confidence of the country, and therefore our only chance of stopping that fatal tide of hysterical legislation which the Opposition are sure to initiate when they have turned us out."

"For my part," Mr. Bott interjected, "and on behalf of my friends, I must express my sorrow that a great English political party should deliberately desire a sanguinary war in order to cling to office."

"The destinies of this Empire," replied Lord Doncastle, rising, "cannot be swayed by a facile humanitarianism."

"Hear!" muttered the Earl of Munster.

“Moreover,” Doncastle continued, “in desiring an immediate war we are actuated by the highest motives. All our continental agents tell us that at the present moment France must win in a struggle. And France ought to win. Her army is in admirable condition, whereas the forces of Germany are suffering from a bad attack of vanity and conceit. The German war Cabinet is well aware of this, and in a few years will have cured the attack, and once more attained superiority over the French army. The fight must come, sooner or later, and if it came later France would lose.” He drank the official water, and went on: “I have, I trust, made it clear to you all that, although there are doubtless many men in the City who could save us if they were given time, there is only one man who can save us in the time at our disposal—Crampiron, who is to be counted among the financial geniuses of the century. Crampiron, however, is condemned to death. What, therefore, is to be done? It appears to me that our line of action is obvious—so obvious that I scarcely need indicate it. His Majesty must be requested to reprieve Crampiron.”

The Cabinet was staggered into muteness. Yet Doncastle had the air of having uttered nothing but a platitude.

“But Crampiron is guilty! Crampiron has confessed!” Mr. Bott protested, shocked.

“What of that? We have to think of the Empire,” said Lord Doncastle, leisurely sitting down.

“The Opposition press will have something to say,

and there will be rude questions in the House," said Mr. Luck.

"As for questions in the House of Lords, I will attend to them personally," replied Lord Doncastle. "In the Lower House, Mr. Bott will doubtless——"

"It is monstrous, monstrous!" cried Mr. Bott, breaking with all traditions of Downing Street decorum.

The scene was just beginning to provide Viscount Somersetshire with that amusement which his cynicism loved, when a diversion was caused by the arrival of Sir John Prester, Chancellor of the Exchequer, breathless.

Sir John Prester was a bachelor of sixty-five, who for forty-four years had enjoyed an income of fifty thousand a year, and to whom clung the faded romance of an early calamity in love. Sir John, at the age of twenty-three, had been engaged to the great heiress of the day, and on the eve of the wedding the great heiress of the day had run off with a Russian attaché. Sir John had consoled himself with sport and politics. He was still handsome. The Russian attaché had died in Siberia and the great heiress mourned him in a secluded villa on the heights above San Remo. It was a story that had inspired several novelists.

Sir John had come from the City, where he had multifarious connections. His nephew, Jack Prester, was a governor of the Bank of England. In a few sentences, characterised by strong emotion, he related what was happening in the City; he had been

warned that very morning by his nephew. He spoke from the middle of the room, fidgeting now and then with his grey but hyacinthine locks. And before any one could stop him he had fairly launched himself on his favourite topic, the preposterous constitution of the Bank of England. He had preached against the preposterous constitution of the Bank of England for four decades. He had issued the most solemn warnings. He had introduced bill after bill. He had even moved amendments to the address to the Throne about the Bank of England. And though every one admitted that he was entirely right, and that the constitution of the Bank of England was indefensible and highly dangerous, he had never been able to persuade any ministry to do anything. He could not understand his failure. He was an accomplished financier, but he had lived to sixty-five without learning that political questions are decided by instinct, a polite name for prejudice, and not by reason.

Such simplicity was pathetic.

The Cabinet had to listen to him as he stood there, with the faint scent of a romantic tragedy still lingering about him. Events themselves were at last proving that he had been right and the rest of the world wrong.

“There is a real panic,” he said loudly. “And what did I say would occur when there was a real panic? It is occurring. There is no genuine gold reserve in the country. The business men of this country de-

pend on the joint-stock banks, and the joint-stock banks depend on the Bank of England. There are five hundred millions of private deposits with joint-stock banks, and when every one wants to realise at once, the joint-stock banks must go to the Bank of England for their cash. Will they get it? No. The Bank of England has lent it again. Shall I tell you how much cash there is at this instant in the banking department of the Bank of England? One million two hundred and ninety-eight thousand one hundred and eighteen pounds! Less than a million and a half as an ultimate reserve against a possible call of five hundred millions! Germany can afford to keep a reserve of seventeen millions of gold locked up in the fortress of Spandau in case of war, but England cannot afford even a decent reserve for the legitimate purposes of commerce! The Bank rate will go up two per cent., and the Bank will refuse to do the very thing it ought to do to restore confidence—lend money freely from the twenty millions lying idle in its issue department—simply because the power on the Board rests solely with a set of nervous old doddering idiots. What would be said of any business concern of which the young directors were forced to retire while the old ones remained in office? That is what obtains at the Bank of England! What would be said of a joint-stock bank of which not one director was a professional banker? That is what obtains in the Bank of England! Doncaste, pass me a biscuit."

No one replied. No one could reply. And Prester John fell into a chair, a forlorn and yet a very dignified figure.

And Doncastle rose again.

“Gentlemen,” said he in his soft voice, absolutely unmoved, “Sir John’s very grave news confirms me in my intention of urging you to adopt a heroic course. There can be no doubt that this lamentable financial crisis has been largely brought about by the uncertainty as to the Crampiron business and by fears as to the course of politics. It is for us to show a decided and a determined front, to give the country a lead. I will put the two alternatives before you. If we act with prompt courage we shall enable Crampiron, from his prison, not only to prove to the City that his business is sound, as it assuredly is, but to conclude finally the Moroccan loan. We shall bring about a war which must ultimately come, at a moment peculiarly favourable to France, our ally. It is true that France does not want war, but in this case we can, in our quality of friendly observer, judge better than she can of what is best for her. Germany will be defeated, and her outrageous ambitions, her disquieting rivalry with ourselves, definitely checked. The last Franco-German war proved to be an unmixed benefit for British commerce; and the next one will undoubtedly prove to be the same. Nothing is better calculated to stop a panic in the City than the assurance of a Franco-German war. Lastly, we shall remain in office for at least another year, and shall be

able to continue without fear our beneficent programme of legislation."

"But——" began Mr. Bott.

"Pardon me." Lord Doncastle raised his finger. "On the other hand, if we do not act, the panic will grow. Commerce will be distorted, trade temporarily ruined. Germany, while suffering a diplomatic defeat at the moment, will enjoy a terrible victory later on. In ten years she will dominate Europe; our ally will be crushed at her feet, and our own naval prestige seriously menaced. Further, this Government will not remain in office a fortnight, and the good we have been able to do in five years of uninterrupted work will be largely nullified by the ineptitudes of our elated opponents. Gentlemen, shall Crampiron be reprieved or shall he not? Let me finish by saying that I saw this morning the daughter of the man whom Crampiron was unfortunate enough to assassinate, and that she protested against his execution. Let me point out to you that Crampiron confessed of his own accord, that he is an ageing man with a very honourable record, and that from my personal knowledge of him I am sure that in return for a reprieve he would do his duty as the greatest force in the City of London."

Doncastle sat down.

Mr. Bott did not waste a moment. He sprang forward. "All the sophistries of the Prime Minister," he exclaimed, at a white heat, "cannot hide the patent fact that he is advocating a gross miscarriage

of justice, a scandalous misuse of administrative power."

A pause ensued.

"Does any one agree with Mr. Bott?" inquired Lord Doncastle.

Not a sound.

"There is one thing," said Mr. Bott. "An appeal to His Majesty's clemency can only go through me as Home Secretary." And he laughed.

"We should be desolated to lose your invaluable services, Mr. Bott," said Lord Doncastle, "but as the whole of the rest of the Cabinet has the misfortune to disagree with you——"

Another silence.

Mr. Bott felt under his chair for his hat. He found it and rose.

"I am a man of principle," he said, with a shaking voice, "though I did work on a farm for fifteen years. I resign."

"You take with you our respect, at any rate," Sir John Prester murmured to him as he strode towards the door. The two shook hands. Mr. Bott bowed very awkwardly to the rest, and departed.

Viscount Somersetshire was appointed to the Home Secretaryship, and the Metropolitan Police were enchanted at the change.

Thus did Doncastle accomplish the most impossible of all the impossible feats which he had performed in his long and dazzling career as a juggler and tight-rope walker.

As he was untying his cravat that night, he gazed at various reassuring telegrams, from Sandringham, from Bedford, from the City, from Berlin, which had reached him in response to his decisive and audacious action. Then he smiled at his image in the glass ; and his valet, who was quite accustomed to his master's soliloquies, heard him say—

“You caused the old fellow to give away his life. You've given him his life back again. So that's all right.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF MILLICENT

“**G**OOD-NIGHT, dear Lady Mary,” said Norah.

“Going to bed?”

Norah embraced the old lady with impulsive warmth as she reclined in her easy-chair.

“You must be tired, poor thing!” murmured Lady Mary. “Sleep well.”

“Good-night, Millicent.”

“Good-night, dearest.”

The two girls kissed.

“Good-night, Mr. Berger.”

“Good-night.”

Holding aside the portière for her, he shook her hand, and bowed. He had not yet decided how to address her, whether as “Mrs. Maurice” or “Norah.” The one form was as beset with difficulties as the other.

And Norah, dressed in black, passed from the inner, or green, drawing-room at Tudor Hundreds, down the centre of the empty but illuminated vastness of the central, or yellow, drawing-room, and so disappeared through the portières leading to the third one. Emile Berger watched her proud and sensitive move-

ments, and then returned to his seat in the small drawing-room between Lady Mary and Millicent. There was a silence in that room. Tears had come into the eyes of Lady Mary. It had seemed, in theory, a strange thing, an almost impossible thing, that the daughter of a murderer should accept the hospitality of the widow and daughter of the murdered. But the arrangement had been brought about by the calm, inflexible will of Millicent, and, once developed from theory into practice, it had proved to be extraordinarily natural and right. As Millicent had said to Lord Donastle—"What have we against Norah?" Conventionality would have held that Norah's presence under the Courlander roof would be intolerable. But common sense, acting in concert with the passive yet intense kindness of Lady Mary, and the reasoned kindness of Millicent, had proved the contrary.

Of course Norah could not have stayed at Tudor Hundreds without Maurice's consent, if Maurice had been there. But Maurice was not there. Two days before, that sombre and tragic figure had quitted the Hundreds after an outburst, in front of Millicent and Emile, that had been as terrible as it had been brief. It occurred when the news arrived that Abraham Crampiron was reprieved. Maurice appeared to be overwhelmed with astonishment. The astonishment gave way to fury, and the fury to a cold and measured anger. He made no comment on the action of the Government. His sole words, uttered in a voice that startled even Millicent, were—"Do they

think he shall escape me?" He had then walked down-stairs, Emile following him. In the hall he had put on his overcoat, taking his customary care that the collar of it was not lower than the collar of his jacket, and he had departed from the house without a command to a servant or a good-bye to his relatives and his friend.

Only, in the porch, he had turned for an instant and said to Emile—"You stay and look after them," "them" doubtless meaning his mother and sister. Later in the day he had telephoned for Curtis to go to London. Then it was that Millicent had insisted upon Norah assuming a place in the household. "When Maurice comes back," Millicent had said, "he will find her here, and the path will be open for a reconciliation." Millicent's practical talent for handling tragic situations of unique delicacy and difficulty as though they were everyday matters was indeed remarkable. She fearlessly took the snake by the neck and proved that it was powerless to harm. In a crisis she was precious to the last degree.

"Mother," said Millicent, when Emile had resumed his seat, "aren't you going to play patience?"

"No," said Lady Mary. "Emile has promised to read to me."

And she wiped her eyes.

Emile and Millicent exchanged a glance. The chatelaine had to be treated with infinite tact and care. Her nervous system had been deranged by the

experiences which Fate had allotted to her, and she was liable to sudden breakdowns, whose symptoms were excessively disconcerting. Moreover, that evening Lady Mary was more sensitive than usual, for Sir Francis Parculier, the lawyer, had been down, and Lady Mary had had to sign many papers in connection with the exceedingly complex devolution of Carl Courlander's possessions.

"I'm going to read Loti's '*Pêcheur d'Islande*,'" Emile explained.

Millicent's eyes asked Emile whether the "Iceland Fisherman" of Pierre Loti would be beneficial to her mother's nerves, and Emile's eyes replied that it would. In her youth Lady Mary had been a fair French scholar, and it diverted and flattered her now, in her age, to listen to French read as Emile could read.

Just then a servant came in with the post and a London evening paper. There was a picture post-card from Maurice for his mother. It was dated Paris, and as Maurice had written a message on the front of it, there had been threepence excess postage to pay. He informed his mother that he was very well in Paris, that Curtis was with him, and that he did not know when he should be back. And he sent his love to his mother. The servant had offered the newspaper to Millicent, but Millicent with a gesture had directed him to hand it to Emile. Emile was now the sole man of the party. He opened it at the official statement that Abraham Crampiron's sentence

had been commuted to twenty years' penal servitude, and an unofficial statement that Crampiron's confession was now generally understood to have been made in a moment of pique caused by domestic misfortunes, and that certain circumstances of a strongly extenuatory nature had been placed before the new Home Secretary, whose first act, etc., etc.

"Anything in the paper?" questioned Lady Mary, passing the card to Millicent. The card had brought balm to her soul.

"No," said Emile with elaborate carelessness. Items of news relating to the tragedy of her life had to be imparted to Lady Mary with many preliminaries and precautions. And in particular she was never told anything in the evening. Emile rustled the pages. "The panic is over in the City. But three firm have been 'hammered,' as they call it. It seems that war between France and Germany is now practically a certainty. The Government got majorities of over thirty in three divisions last night."

It pleased Emile thus to display his familiarity with the commercial and political life of England. As to the prospect of war, it seemed not greatly to excite him, but he added: "I may have to serve." He put down the paper, perused Maurice's postcard which Millicent had at length passed to him, and then he picked up Pierre Loti and began to read that charming piece of facile sentiment in his low, clear, French voice.

He had scarcely achieved the first page of it when

Norah, whose approach no one had heard, showed herself for an instant between the portières and beckoned to Millicent. There was something imperative and wild in the quick motion of Norah's white hand, something of pathetic appeal in her features, and Millicent sprang up and went out silently. Lady Mary's eyes were closed, and she was oblivious of the incident. Emile paused in his reading for the fraction of a second and then proceeded. The two girls could hear him as they hurried down the middle drawing-room.

"What is it?" Millicent asked in a whisper, when they reached the third drawing-room and could not be overheard.

"I saw a light in the statue from my window," said Norah excitedly. "It lasted for a little while and then went out."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure. Oh, Millicent, who can it be?"

"I don't know."

"I feel it is Maurice. It must be Maurice. He must have come back from Paris."

Norah clutched at Millicent's arm. The prospect, half a fear and half a divine hope, of meeting her husband had moved her to the inmost centre of her soul. That morning she had accomplished the ordeal of seeing her father in his cell. Was she now to face the ordeal of seeing Maurice? She seemed to imagine so. As Millicent uttered no word, she cried impatiently—

"What are we to do?"

"Hush!" Millicent enjoined her. "We must tell Emile. It won't do to tell him in front of mother; it would alarm her. It won't do to call him out either; that would alarm her too. I'll send a little note in to him." She rang a bell.

Five minutes later a footman brought to Millicent the reply which Emile had scribbled on the back of Millicent's note. "Do nothing till I come. I will leave Lady Mary as soon as I can without making her suspicious. The key ought to be in the left-hand drawer of the little writing-table in Maurice's bedroom. Please get it."

"If it is Maurice," said Millicent, "Maurice will have the key."

"There may be two keys," said Norah.

They ran upstairs together to Maurice's bedroom. The key was in the drawer indicated by Emile. They looked at each other, and went downstairs to the south door and waited for Emile. And Emile did not come. The night was cold, and a full moon made the heavens magnificent and the earth spectrally clear. Far off, as they stood on the terrace, they could distinguish the mighty bulk of the statue under the moon. Each moment they turned to see if Emile was coming, and Emile did not come. Then suddenly the red light flashed in the height of the statue, casting a steady beam to the southeast.

"It must be Maurice," Norah hysterically whispered.

And she ran off down the steps.

“Norah!”

The call was vain. And Millicent had to follow.

Hurry as she might, she did not overtake the girl until Norah, having passed the lake, and crossed the carriage road that united the East and West Lodges, was breasting the slope of the avenue of elms. It was an extraordinary pursuit, and Millicent felt it to be extraordinary; but she had no alternative but to engage in it. As chance had it, Norah was in possession of the key.

“Norah,” Millicent urged, catching her by the sleeve of her frock, “we must wait for Emile; we can’t enter the statue without him. He’ll wonder what has become of us!”

“Oh, Millicent,” Norah cried, plaintively and yet defiantly, “don’t stop me. Of course we can enter the statue. I’ve been in with Maurice. And he’s there now—I feel sure he’s there now. And—and—”

Breaking loose, she hurried forward again. And the ruby in the finger of the statue glowed dully under the splendour of the moon that showed the minutest tracery of the elm’s naked branches.

At last they reached the statue, enigmatic and formidable now as it had ever been. Norah rushed up the steps of the plinth, Millicent a few paces behind her.

“You can’t open it!” said Millicent.

“Yes, I can,” Norah asserted. And open the door

she did. She seemed to be guided by some singular and infallible instinct. She seemed to be sure, not only that she was about to meet the Maurice of her passionate love, but that such a scene would enact itself between them as would erase all the past and beautify all the future.

Having opened the door, she drew the key from the lock, and out of the moonlight passed into the obscurity of the statue's interior. Millicent hesitated, peered down the long slope of the avenue in search of Emile, and then followed Norah. In a moment Norah had found the switch, and the lower hall of the statue glowed under its electric bulbs. Dust lay everywhere, thick and undisturbed. Norah went to the lift and unlatched the cage, and stepped into the lift. Millicent glanced fearfully up the black shaft of the lift-well, and at the top saw a gleam of radiance.

"Norah," she protested, "we can't go up alone!"

"I am going up," said Norah. "All one has to do is to touch this button."

And she touched the button. She touched it twice. The lift did not stir.

"I'm very glad it doesn't work," said Millicent. "We must wait for Emile."

"I know what's the matter," Norah exclaimed. "It won't go up because the grille isn't shut." She put her hand on the dusty grille to close it. "Are you coming?" she demanded in a determined voice.

"Norah!"

"Are you coming, or not?"

Millicent entered the lift. Norah banged the grille, touched the button again, and the lift leaped upwards towards the mystery of the statue. Millicent, carried off as much by Norah's sudden fit of madness as by the lift, resigned herself, and told herself that she must remain as calm as might be. The sensation of being swept off her feet by the insensate caprice of a high-spirited but unsagacious girl like Norah, was a novel one for the strong-willed and deliberate Millicent. Before she could wonder what they were going to encounter at the top, and how they were going to encounter it, the lift came to rest with a jerk. Norah opened the grille and emerged from the lift into the anteroom of the great chamber of the statue. The door of the chamber was slightly ajar, and through the aperture came the radiance which Millicent had observed from the bottom of the lift-well.

And now it was Norah who hung back. She stood with one hand on the grille, in such a position that Millicent could not get out. There was just light enough for Millicent to see that the girl's eyes were blinking rapidly and her breast heaving. It was as though Norah feared, in the supreme moment itself, to put her faith to the test and go boldly into the chamber.

"Let me come out," Millicent whispered.

Norah moved aside, and Millicent quitted the lift.

Then neither of them moved nor spoke. There was

no sound, no murmur of life, from the chamber whose secrets the door screened.

"Who is there?"

It was Millicent's clear voice, loud and firm, that broke the silence.

No answer, no breath, no stir.

"Who is there?" Millicent demanded again.

No reply. Only a disconcerting, uncanny silence.

"I am going in," said Millicent, with decision.

And she pushed open the door with a hand that was courageous but trembling, and entered the great chamber. And Norah was at her shoulder.

The great chamber was empty. The ornate cluster of electric lamps in the centre of the ceiling burned steadily among reflecting crystals, emphasising the solitude, intensifying the weird effect of that solitude. The chairs stood as Norah had last seen them in the hour of her parting from Maurice; nothing seemed to be changed. But on the banqueting table, on the very corner of it which Maurice had said must have been sat upon by the obese Sibthorpe, lay a little red book, open.

The eyes of the two girls wandered round the walls to find the hiding-place of the being who had mounted into the statue, illuminated it, and then—vanished. But there was no shelter for the shadow of a ghost. Every detail of the room stood plainly revealed under the dazzling beams of the electric cluster, and nothing could be more sure than that it held no possible place

of concealment; no cupboard, no screen, no other door. Millicent stepped back into the anteroom and opened the door of the service-room to the left, and the service-room was equally empty.

“There is no one,” said she to Norah, in the great chamber. “It is absolutely certain that there is no one here.” They gazed at each other, made fearful by they knew not what. They were alone in the height of the statue, high above the elm-tops: they were alone; yet some one had preceded them and lit the interior, and faded into nothingness.

“What’s that book?” Millicent asked.

She advanced to the table and cast an eye on the book. It was a little notebook and contained nothing but letters and figures, arranged in an incomprehensible way, in a handwriting with which Millicent was not familiar.

Norah burst into sobs.

“No,” she murmured, “he is not here. I thought—I thought——”

She could not finish. The woe of her disappointment overcame her, and she might have fallen if Millicent had not seized her in her arms. All that impassioned energy, that flying zeal which had carried her to the statue, was spent and gone.

“We will go down again, dearest,” said Millicent, soothingly.

And they went down, and this time it was Millicent who manipulated the lift.

And as they emerged into the night air they en-

countered Emile, who had been vainly trying to force open the door of the statue.

"Oh, Emile!" Millicent exclaimed lamely.

"I came as quickly as I could," said the young man, in a tone which Millicent had never heard from his lips before. "I could not leave Lady Mary instantly. No one knew where you were. I sent everywhere for you. At last I came here."

"We've been up in the statue," said Millicent.

"I perceive it," Emile retorted grimly. "And then?"

"There is no one in the statue. But the lights are burning."

"I will go up myself."

He pushed past them almost rudely.

Millicent made as if to follow him.

"Please stay here," he commanded, glaring angrily at her.

Millicent obeyed.

In a quarter of an hour Emile re-descended.

"You said the lights were burning?" he began.

"They were burning when we went up, and I left them burning."

"There were no lights burning when I went up," said Emile.

"Did you bring down the little red book?" Millicent asked him.

"What little red book?"

"A notebook that was lying on the corner of the table."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. We saw it lying on the table. There were a lot of figures written in it."

"I turned on the lights, and I thoroughly searched the room, and I am perfectly convinced that there was no book on the table. I remember distinctly that there was nothing on the table. I'll see you back to the house, if you please."

Norah had already gone on in front. She seemed to be moving quickly. Emile and Millicent, side by side, followed at a slower pace. Neither spoke for a few moments. Millicent threw a timid glance, or rather an intimidated glance, from time to time at Emile's face.

"Will you kindly put that scarf over your head?" said Emile, brusquely.

Millicent was wearing over her black dress a long white scarf, the end of which came down to her knees.

"I do not feel the cold," said she.

"Will you kindly put it over your head?" he repeated, still more brusquely, looking straight in front of him.

She obeyed and sighed.

"What is the matter with you?" she ventured.

"I will tell you what is the matter," said he. "Why did you go to the statue alone? Did I not tell you to do nothing till I came?" He stopped, and she was obliged to stop.

"Norah would go," she excused herself. "And so I——"

"Norah!" he repeated, scornfully. There was no longer in his composition anything of the chivalrous Frenchman. "You ought not to have done it. You were wicked to do it. What danger you ran—who knows? I told you to do nothing. You had no right to go."

"Right!" she flashed. "After all, I am at home." Her lips twitched.

"I say you had no right," he persisted, furiously. "You are a woman and you had no right. You might have been killed. Imagine it! Two women alone, like that. Suppose that you had been murdered! Could I have looked at your mother again?"

"I'm sorry," she said, humbly.

"It is useless to be sorry," he went on relentlessly. "All women are fools—fools!"

His voice rose on the night air.

"Really, Mr. Berger!"

He seized her hand with a cruel grip. She wanted to assert herself, to remind him that she was Millicent Courlander and he only a guest at the Hundreds. "Suppose harm had come to you? Evil? What should I have done? Ah! I have no longer confidence in you. You, who were always so sensible, so wise! Do you wish to ruin me with your caprices?"

"Really!" she murmured, dumfounded.

"I am beside myself," he gasped at her. His face was very close to hers and she could see clearly in the moonlight that it was drawn out of the likeness of itself. She did not know what attitude to adopt.

“Do you know that you are my life? Do you know that you are the only thing in the world for me, you cold, calm, capricious creature? Am I stone? Ah, *mon Dieu*, you shall see if I am stone!”

And upon these words, in a passion quite uncontrolled, he incontinently put his arms round her and pressed her to him with the grasp of a madman. And then he was kissing her, assaulting her with a fire of kisses that burned her neck and her cheeks and her mouth. What would she not have given to wrench herself away from him, and play the part of the outraged maiden! But she could not. Her strength of will, and her strength of body, seemed to ebb away from her. She shut her eyes. She lay limp in those violent and cruel arms. She could feel her heart beating against his.

“I love you!” he muttered as if in agony, “I love you! And you might have been killed!”

Now, if ever, she must prove to this Frenchman, in whom a devil seemed to have been suddenly let loose, that his behaviour was inexcusable and without hope or pardon; that he had insulted her beyond forgiveness. But she could not. She could not summon up in herself the power to prove to him his incredible madness.

“Oh, Emile!” she murmured, and wept, and he kissed her eyes.

Such was the brief and breathless wooing of Milliecent Courlander. Had any one dared to predict to her that she would be so wooed, she would have an-

nihilated the prophet with one glance of disdain. But none knows the possibilities of his nature. None knows to what he may come! That Emile Berger would one day have won Millicent for his own, no sagacious observer would have positively denied. But that he would win her in such a way, by an intemperate masculine dominance that amounted almost to brutality, had appeared an unimaginable impossibility. And if there was one person more astounded than Millicent, it was Emile.

When he had resumed possession of himself he was afraid. He became humble before her; he stammered; he apologised; he did everything but kneel. But the happy mischief was irrevocably accomplished.

As they walked past the lake, hand in hand, Millicent said—

“Do not let us tell mother to-night.”

“Your mother has gone to bed,” he answered.

“Nor Norah!”

“I am your slave,” he said.

But Millicent suspected that, though one of them was indeed the slave of the other, it was not he. And she was glad. She was glad that she had surrendered, like a slave, to the fierce and masterful cruelty of his arms.

Emile spent the greater part of next day within the statue, studying it, and in particular accustoming himself to the noiseless use of the lift in the dark.

And at night, with a revolver in his pocket, he went forth after dinner, and ensconced himself under the table in the great chamber. He had entered without a sound. He waited, never moving. He waited several hours, and his senses, though excited to the uttermost delicacy of perception, were cognisant of no phenomenon of any kind. And then, just after the stables-clock had boomed eleven, he became aware that some living thing was in the chamber, that he was not alone there, that something stirred and crept. And he braced himself. And then suddenly there was a bright light; the chamber had been lit up. He saw the legs of a man from his ambush under the table. He sprang forth. At the same instant the light was extinguished, and there was not only complete darkness but complete silence. Boldly he struck a match and peered about. The room was absolutely empty. Moreover, the door, the sole means of egress, which he had purposely closed, was still closed; and he was sure that nobody could have opened and shut that door rapidly without making a sound.

He was entirely at a loss. He could not even invent a theory to account for the amazing experience. He went to the electric switch, and turned it; but the illumination did not follow. The current was no longer active.

When he regained the house he discovered that the house was lighted by a few sparse candles, hurriedly collected by the servants. The electric current had

failed in the house also! Millicent had already summoned the manager of the electric light plant—the expert who had been engaged to succeed the vanished German—and this personage arrived a few moments after Emile. He was desolated. He was full of excuses. But he was obliged to admit that his reserve of current had inexplicably run out. He gave all the details of his calculations, including the exact number of kilowatts which the house used in a month, and asserted that that evening at eight o'clock the dials in his engine-room showed a reserve which would have kept the house going for three days at least. He was convinced that if every light in the house and grounds and stables and lodges and statue had been kept burning all day, and all the lifts had been incessantly moving, his available reserve could not possibly have been exhausted.

Asked to explain, he said simply that there must be a leak. He said that he had once or twice before suspected a leak.

He was very much troubled.

But he got his engines to work speedily, and after quite a short delay, the current was resumed, and the candles dispensed with.

This singular accident monopolised the attention of The Hundreds for a long time. It even got itself into the *Dunstable Herald*. The world at large, however, had other and even more impressive matters upon which to reflect. For soon afterwards England was startled even to the central Peak of Derbyshire

by the news that the Sultan of Morocco had accepted a loan through the intermediary of France, the German loan having failed. The war-cloud evaporated and the Doncastle Government fell with a loud crash.

It was all vastly interesting.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE VISIT

ON an afternoon in June of the next year, a train whistled its way out of Yelverton station, to climb from the southern hollows of Devonshire to the highest and loneliest town in England. It comprised two third-class coaches, and one composite coach with one first-class and two second-class compartments. In the first-class compartment was a solitary passenger, a young woman dressed in black and veiled. She had journeyed alone from London, peremptorily refusing the companionship which her friends had urged her to accept. Her luggage had been left at a hotel in Plymouth, and she carried nothing but a small black satchel. After much laborious and fussy expenditure of steam and smoke, the train surmounted the lower acclivities; a keener air began to blow in at the windows, and, far above her, the woman caught the first disconcerting glimpses of the desolate regions whose central fastness was her goal. With an occasional halt at hamlets whose stout cottages gleamed a pale grey among the verdure of starved but indomitable trees, the train passed gradually upwards and was soon lost amid the

tumbled horizons of gigantic heath-clad hills. And then, suddenly, the last trace of cultivation had vanished below; from under the very wheels of the train the heath sprang and stretched away in measureless smooth slopes aloft to mighty and stone-crowned summits where sky and earth had free communion.

It was like a solemn and fateful parting from the world of human hearts, and an invasion, audacious and desperate, of the eternal kingdoms of granite. The woman opened her satchel and took from it a document which she knew by rote, but which she mournfully scanned again. The blue paper gave her authority, by signature of the governor of Dartmoor Prison, to visit and have speech with convict No. 1211. She folded it and replaced it in the bag. And now the train, reduced by the majesty of its environment to a toy mechanism, was winding round the terrific shoulders of the tors; and peak rose above peak, in an endless panorama of ling and stone and trailing heavy cloud; and still the train climbed, following the telegraph-wire that threaded through the mountainous waste like the clue of some sinister labyrinth. And then, just when the harshness of that ever-changing monotony had grown intolerable to the woman's tortured soul, there was a cessation of effort; the train ran down an incline and under a bridge, and the passenger saw the ugly square tower of a granite church dominating slate roofs and granite walls—all grey within the enfolding grey of hill and cloud.

The brakes rasped and the train stopped with a jerk.

"Princetown!" cried a porter.

The woman got out, gave up her ticket, and, not daring to ask for information, followed the thin stream of travellers towards a group of houses.

She found herself presently in the main street of a small town of which every habitation was fashioned in granite; on all sides the eye was met by mortised granite or by naked stretches of moorland topped with gigantic stone that drew down the lowering skies; and here and there, lying on the flanks of the wilderness, like long yellow ribbons looped and curved, stretched the high-roads leading down from the fastness back to humanity.

The woman could not accost the grocer at his shop-door and ask: "Will you please tell me the way to the prison?" But chance directed her footsteps. She turned to the left, and after passing schools and villas she came to a barracks, where wardens and their wives tried to practise the art of love, and then she saw the outskirts of the prison itself—the fastness within the fastness, the inmost mystery, the black heart of Provincetown. By that time half a hundred people were aware of her purpose, and half a dozen specially learned in the life of the prison had made a good guess at her identity. The road divided a grove of trees, and then, over a high hedge she heard the click of croquet balls and the ripple of human laughter. And ten yards further

on rose the outer granite archway of the prison, the state entrance, the one visible break in a granite ring twenty feet high and a mile in circumference. In the forehead of the archway grinned the appalling cynicism of its notorious Latin inscription. And in front of the archway there tramped to and fro a warder armed to the teeth, who listened every fine afternoon to the click of croquet-balls. The woman could not know that her coming had already been whispered to him. She could not divine that she was in a whispering-gallery, a town of whispers that fly by magic and with the rapidity of thought, from street to street; a town where every one whispers and looks askance because there is never a moment when that which may not be uttered aloud is not occurring; a town of secrets and suspicions and conspiracies against which one stumbles in the obscurity of unmurmured things.

The woman stopped timidly, saw within the archway another wall and archway, and within that still another, each guarded; and then, having spoken to the sentinel, she entered the precincts. It was by no means her first visit to a prison, but she had not seen such a prison as this, and it affrighted her. As she was handed onwards from official to official, and gates and doors were unlocked before her and locked behind her, and she traversed corridors and courtyards to the continual accompaniment of jangling keys, not all the sympathetic courtesy of wardens subjugated by her beauty and her sorrow, could reassure her.

At length her way was barred by an iron grille, and beyond that grille was another grille, and between the two stood a man with a gun, who stared vacantly at the stone floor or at the lime-washed walls. And then she perceived a tall figure in the yellow knicker-bockers and jacket of the convict, behind the second grille, like a tiger in a cage. The man with the gun was in her line of sight, and she moved.

"Well, Norah?" said the convict, in a firm voice.

"Father, how are you?"

She put her face against the bars, and kept back the tears.

The man with the gun appeared to ignore both of them absolutely.

So the interview began, with vague and difficult exchanges. The tragedy of these precious minutes is that they are half gone ere the unpractised hand has learned to use them.

And to-day the attitude of her father baffled Norah. He seemed, as he always seemed, unbroken in spirit. He seemed even more defiant than usual in the unyielding supremacy of his soul, more than ever a being who, instead of demanding pity, gave it. Yet he could not or would not talk easily. It was as if he had nothing to say and was regarding the ceremony impatiently as a sort of useless rite.

"You are quite free from your lumbago?" she inquired, after a strange pause.

"Ja!" he answered in a low tone and with a peculiar glance, with the accent of the South African

Dutch. He had taught her Dutch when she was a child.

Still holding her with his eyes, he said very quickly in Dutch—

“Escape next week.”

Norah started; she could not help it. The man with the gun also started. The man with the gun scowled at one of the animals behind the bars, and then he looked at the other and did not scowl.

“English, please,” he muttered, drily. “Or you’ll go. You both know the rule.”

A silence.

Norah could not speak. Her father’s tone was so positive, so assured, that she had no alternative but to believe what from any other lips would have been incredible. Escape! The idea was fantastic. But he announced it as though it were a question of packing up and driving off in a cab amid the hurrahs of the populace.

“Perfectly easy,” said he.

He smiled with an indulgent cynicism, glancing disdainfully down, from his superior height, at the man with the gun. This latter was uneasy.

“Yes,” Crampiron continued. “Perfectly easy. Just ask them to endorse the cheque and you can cash it either at the Piccadilly branch or in the City.”

She comprehended that the speech was made merely to reassure the man with the gun.

“I see,” she replied, her heart violently beating.

“You’ll hear,” he said.

It was all she could learn. When the limit of the interview was reached, and the machinery of the prison put into motion to separate them, the convict turned away with a gesture and a mien whose grandeur neither his costume nor his situation could impair. After all, he was Crampiron. After all, the governor and the deputy-governor were always telling visitors that their best prisoners were the murderers. And Crampiron, as much by his individuality as by the notoriety of his crime, was easily the star captive of those walls.

Back again on the Tavistock high-road, Norah tried to collect her ideas, to realise the import of the brief message flung to her by her father in defiance of the man with the gun. Assuming that he escaped, whither would he go? Where could he hide? Not in England! Not in any civilised country! What then? But no doubt her father had thought of everything. He was the most marvellous and masterful of men. She longed ardently for the success of his enterprise. She forgot that he had murdered. Never had she felt such sympathy with him.

The train to Plymouth did not leave till six o'clock. She could not walk up and down the whispering street, nor could she wait at the station. With something of her father's ruthless force she struck out northwards on to the open moor, and, seeing a summit within climbing distance, she decided to reach it. It was North Hissory, scarcely a mile off. After twenty minutes of climbing she was at the top among

the immense jagged boulders of the tor; Princetown at her feet, and the wide, heaving circle of the moor with its circumference of peaks, around her. The prospect was overwhelming in its beauty, and the breath of the naked hills roused her like a cordial. But it had been better for the tranquillity of her mind if she had not climbed North Hissory. She heard steps on the highest boulder, a couple of feet above her head. Turning, alarmed, she looked up, and saw Maurice, whom she had not seen since she left him in the statue. He was staring downwards at the prison and the prison grounds, spread out like a map below.

In a flash she understood. Maurice had got wind of the projected escape, and he was there to stop it. His vindictive anger had not cooled. He was relentless as he had ever been. No one had told her that the remission of the death-sentence had infuriated Maurice; but she knew it by instinct.

He frowned at her. His face, in its surprise, was terrible.

A fearful cry came from her.

"Maurice!" she sobbed. "He's going to try to escape!"

"Do you think I don't know it?" the man answered.

"You won't do anything to stop him!" she appealed piteously.

"He shall never escape," said Maurice, and disappeared.

She remained, utterly overcome, a long time on



In a flash she understood that he knew.



the tor. Then she descended. Useless to stay! Useless to linger in Princetown. She could not see her father again for months. She could not write to him. No message could reach him from the world, no warning that Maurice lay in wait to foil his plans.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE INFLUENCE OF ADA

**O**N the third storey of the warders' barracks, with an uninterrupted view of the churchyard from her front windows and an uninterrupted view of the prison buildings from her back windows, lived a young and pretty woman whose Christian name was Ada. While fulfilling her destiny as a lady's-maid at Torquay she had met a young warder and fallen deeply in love with him. Every one had pointed out to her that, if she married him, she would be exchanging a life of ease and variety for a life of monotonous toil. Of course she married him. She did her best, by means of lace curtains and bows of pink ribbon, to transform the quarters of a young married warder into a home. But the fact remained that every drop of water used on the third storey had to be carried by her in pails up sixty-two stone steps. In a month she loathed Princetown; its prison, its church, its barracks, its social atmosphere and its water-supply. She would have done no matter what to leave Princetown. But she could not leave Princetown because her husband could not leave it; and she was still deeply in love with him. A warder can't flit from spot to spot at will like a compositor or a stonemason.

The difference between him and a prisoner is that the prisoner is fast to the prison for a term of years, while the warder is fast there for life.

One dark night, when Ada was climbing the deserted road to Princetown after an excursion to Two Bridges, a man overtook her and whispered in her ear: "Would you like to earn a thousand pounds?" Ada was an extremely clever young woman. After she and her husband had had supper and the doors of the little flat were bolted and the curtains drawn, she whispered to her husband that there was a chance of earning a thousand pounds, a chance of freedom, a chance of paradise, after hell. Let it be repeated that, besides being clever, she was young and pretty. Her husband was young and upright. Beauty is frail and fleeting, but when it pits itself against uprightness the battle is not to the strong. The warder was a reflective man. What chiefly struck him was the skill and patience of the person or persons who had singled out just his uprightness for attack, and who had chosen Ada as their tool. Such person or persons, he argued, must know what they were about, and must triumph. It was unlikely that they would be clumsy. He was not therefore very apprehensive of trouble.

So it occurred one afternoon that Ada, having walked out of Princetown sundry miles, got into a train at the little station of Dowsland, and in the compartment was one individual, a shabbily-dressed man whom she had never seen before, but who handed her a thousand pounds in small notes, which she put

into her bodice, and who spoke to her briefly. "I have them," she whispered to her husband that evening, behind the closed doors and the drawn curtains, and then she whispered to him the message with which she had been charged. It was the third of such messages. Her husband woke up in the middle of the night and whispered: "In six months we shall be able to leave." "Why not sooner?" she asked. "It won't be safe," he said.

That was a Friday night, and two days after Norah's visit to the prison and her discovery of Maurice watching on North Hissory Tor. On the Saturday evening the young warder had to hand the nocturnal gruel and bread to the captives in Gallery C of the prison. In Gallery C dwelt captive No. 1211, the greatest celebrity that Dartmoor had held for many a year, but for all that only a number, entitled to certain ounces of gruel and other delicacies. The procession of food and almoners advanced slowly along the gallery, halting in front of each door. The young warder had a bright key in his hand. He unlocked a door, took the allotted food from his acolytes, pushed open the door, entered, left the food, came out, and relocked the door. The rite occupied about fifteen or twenty seconds at each cell. Moreover the warder was never out of hearing, and scarcely out of sight, of his acolytes.

When he came to the cell of No. 1211 he pushed the door slightly to with his shoulder as he entered. But for several days he had made a practice of doing that

at every cell. He might have spilled the delicious soup by accident on the floor ; he might have dropped his key ; he might have invented fifty dodges to enable him to spend a few extra seconds in the cell. He most strictly refrained, however, from doing anything singular. He knew that afterwards, if the distributors of banknotes accomplished their desires, any singular act on his part would stand out of the mystery like a torch in the gloom, and accuse him. Therefore he behaved at the cell of No. 1211 precisely as he behaved at the cells of all the others. Only as he was depositing the supper he leaned forward and, putting his mouth close to the ear of No. 1211, whispered slowly, but in a whisper that was so faint as scarcely to be articulate—

“Monday. Three. If wet, Tuesday.”

He had earned his thousand pounds. Ada is now loving him in Quebec.

No. 1211 made no sign : merely took his supper and began meditatively to eat it.

Dartmoor prison is not one homogeneous whole, like the Hotel Ritz. It is a group of buildings of various ages and styles, connected by corridors and by telephones. In traversing it one can trace the gradual evolution of the advanced and dangerous idea that a criminal is a human being from the conservative idea that a criminal is a tiger. Gallery C belongs to the older history of the prison. It consists of two rows of cells, one superimposed on the other, lighted and ventilated from the gallery itself. The hygienic

principles which inspired its construction were about on a level with those of a Cairo native bazaar. In a few years, Gallery C will cease to be used, and will be displayed, empty, to visitors, for an example of mediæval manners, as still more ancient portions of the prison are now shown. Meantime, a prisoner lodged in Gallery C considers himself privileged, for, the cell-divisions being relatively thin, the architecture of Gallery C makes for sociableness by means of the fine art of tapping. Only good prisoners go to Gallery C. No. 1211 got there in his quality of a reprieved murderer, for murderers are invariably a pattern and exemplar of prison morality.

Occasionally the wrong kind of man is put into Gallery C. Such a man had been installed in the cell next to No. 1211. And one day he had amused himself by tearing his blankets and pillow to shreds, ripping up a Bible, a Turkish grammar (which he had obtained from the library), and a treatise on the steam-engine into minute fragments, and smashing every utensil in the cell. A warder had found him stark naked, with all his clothes equally torn to little bits, and a notice scratched on the door of the cell, "This house to let." The prison authorities, having but a feeble appreciation of humour, coldly calculated that the joke had cost the British ratepayer five pounds; therefore the humorist was removed, and spent a period of calmness with his hands joined behind his back in a figure-of-eight fetter. The affair had a very important influence upon No. 1211, for the reason that

the dismantled cell was next tenanted by a gentleman. Gentlemen are specially uncomfortable in a large prison, not because they cannot accommodate themselves as well as others to an ordered existence, but because the mass of the guests lavish all their spare ingenuity upon making their lives unpleasant. Therefore, when two gentlemen are neighbours, one a murderer and the other a forger, and both are experts in tapping (No. 1211 had acquired the art at Bedford), and the dividing wall is flimsy, they are apt to grow friendly, and if one can help the other—for a consideration—he will do it.

That night, after supper and the final visitation, No. 1211 lay in bed reading a volume of the *Strand Magazine* (from which a thoughtful librarian had removed the detective stories). It was barely seven o'clock, but all the guests in all the galleries were safely tucked up. He read for an hour, and then the light began to fail, and through the high pane of his cell he could no longer distinguish the ironwork of the gallery outside. Then he shut the volume of the *Strand Magazine* and went to sleep. He woke up when it was absolutely dark; impossible to discern the form of anything whatever. He listened. There was no sound save an occasional groan or sigh from some dream-ridden captive. A strange and uneasy silence brooded over Gallery C and over all the galleries; the vast microcosm, when it did slumber, did not sleep the sleep of infancy.

And far away, in an office, an official stood at a tel-

ephone-receiver, and heard at intervals reports from the farthest points of the prison. To the captives it was the middle of the night, but to that official it was only ten o'clock, and he was anticipating with eagerness a bridge party. No. 1211 slipped out of bed, and stole to the opposite wall and scratched thereon with his finger-nail. The resulting noise was so slight that it would have been inaudible to an untrained ear. Nevertheless, within a quarter of a minute it was answered. A conversation of tapping ensued between No. 1211 and the gentleman-forger.

“Monday?” said No. 1211.

“Yes.”

“Three o’clock?”

“Yes.”

“If fine?”

“Yes.”

“You understand what to do?”

“Yes. But——”

The mouse-like chatter, which was proceeding with extraordinary rapidity, ceased suddenly. No. 1211 cocked an ear, and wondered why it had ceased. Then he heard a short, dry cough, not from any of the cells, but from the freedom of the corridor. And he understood. A high dignitary was going round in his lawn-tennis shoes, as he sometimes did of a night. The forger had caught that tread long before the dignitary’s cough had betrayed him. The forger’s ears were finer than those of No. 1211—probably

because he had begun forging early in life. After a pause the chatter of taps was resumed.

“But I have no guarantee.”

“Yes. My promise.”

“Good. When will my wife have the money?”

“In three days.”

“Your word on it?”

“My word.”

“Five thousand pounds?”

“Five thousand pounds.”

“Good-night.”

“Good-night.”

No. 1211 crept back to bed. The genius of Morse had had a usefulness wider than Morse had ever anticipated.

The next morning, being Sunday, the captives of Gallery C were marshalled in the stone corridor, and between loaded guns were conducted to church for a full service of hymn and praise. They were very regular church-goers. They sat on benches, not too close together, and at the ends of the benches, perched in eyries about six feet high, were loaded guns. The clergyman, upon whose either hand were displayed the Ten Commandments in large type, announced a hymn, the organ burst into joyous, inspiring music, and the captives lustily sang. But they did not sing the hymn. That is to say, they sang a couple of lines or so of the hymn and then deviated into literature of their own. When they ought to have been vociferating that

"He plants his footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm,"

they were lifting up their voices to the effect that the bread had been hard that morning, that the clergyman had a wart on his nose, that so-and-so was malingering, that some one else meant to complain to the governor, and even far more intimate morsels of news. No. 1211 had hoped to be next to his neighbour the forger, but in this he was disappointed. Two benches and a gun separated him from the forger. And the sole sign that passed between them was an honest, good-natured wink, which seemed to give No. 1211 much satisfaction. That wink from the forger was the event of the day for No. 1211. It left him completely assured.

But during the next night he heard the rain pattering on the glass roof of the gallery. And the rain was not only in the highest degree disconcerting, but it seriously interfered with conversations. Further, it continued throughout the night, and it had not stopped when breakfast was served. The captives whose employment was in the open air, and of whom No. 1211 was one and the forger another, waited in vain for the summons to labour. At ten o'clock they knew that they would not be called that morning. At half-past eleven a ray of sunshine came through the glass roof of the gallery, and drew No. 1211 as by a magic rope out of the abysses of despair. At dinner-time, every convict in the prison knew that

the governor had been summoned by telegram to the sick bed of a relative and had gone off in his motor-car. The departure of the governor was not five minutes old before it had thus spread, by mysterious and indefinable agencies, throughout the whole area of the prison. No. 1211 tried to eat his dinner but he could not finish it.

After dinner came the summons to the moor. Doors were opened, numbers read off a list, little groups of captives collected together, and these groups united in the courtyards. When the squadron containing No. 1211 and the forger was at length formed, it passed in single file out of the precincts of the prison on to the prison farm, and descended like a snake towards the road leading from Two Bridges to Tavistock. It comprised some thirty-five immortal souls in yellow knickerbockers, thick stockings and heavy boots, with stubbly, weather-beaten faces and very short hair under their caps. Most of them, plunged in a profound indifference, looked neither to the right nor to the left, nor even up at the brilliant sun. No. 1211 gazed at the distant tors with an abstracted air. As for the forger, he was obviously nervous. Six loaded guns accompanied the column, one twenty yards in front, a second twenty yards behind, and the others in two widely separated pairs on either side. The captives appeared to have the freedom of the moor, but none could have deviated from the column except at the risk of his life.

Gates were opened, and the procession crossed the

road into a potato field which an earlier generation of captives had reclaimed from the moor and drained. And then the captives received tools and developed suddenly into weeders of potatoes. Some wheeled barrows of weeds to a growing pile in a corner of the field near the gate. All were free to move; all had the sun and the air, and the smell and colour of the earth, and the panorama of the moor. But a warder with a loaded gun stood on the wall between the road and the field, and the rest made a fatal circle from which there could be no escape. One, at the further end of the field, never stirred far away from a field-telephone which communicated with the prison and with other outposts further on the moor. The potato-weeding went steadily on, and the earth continued its revolution, and the heap of weeds that No. 1211 was constructing with the aid of his wheelbarrow mounted higher and higher.

Suddenly a rapid series of explosive sounds were heard—from the direction of Two Bridges, and a very noisy motor-car thundered down the slope of the road. It was so obstreperous and so rapid, and its high grey sides gave it such a peculiar aspect, that several warders and all captives turned to look at it as it flew along. With a screech of brakes it stopped near the warder on the wall, and a little man in goggles jumped down and inspected a wheel. All the while the engine kept up its deafening explosions. The warder on the wall knew his duty; he only gave one glance at the car, and then resumed his watch over

the field. It was he who first saw that the gentleman-forger had taken advantage of the preoccupation of the other warders to make a mad bolt for liberty up the field toward the open moor.

“Hi!” he shouted.

And two warders, then three, were instantly in pursuit of the gentleman-forger. The adventure of the gentleman-forger was indeed desperate. How could he escape? Already the warder at the telephone was telephoning.

“Stop!” cried the pursuing warders.

The gentleman-forger kept on, breasting the hill. He was demented. Even if he escaped for the moment, he could never have got off the moor, for the whole moor and all the children of the moor would be against him.

“Stop!” cried the warders again.

But he kept on.

After the third order to stop, it was the duty of the warders to fire; the rules left them no discretion.

“Stop!” for the third time.

Then the man stumbled and fell, and threw up his arms and in the most feeble manner allowed himself to be collared by two breathless warders.

It was not till the first fine ecstasy of interest in this pleasing episode had abated that the warders noted the disappearance of the guard who ought to have been standing on the wall. His absence drew their attention to an abandoned wheelbarrow near the pile of weeds, and then to the absence of No. 1211. At

that moment the noisy motor-car moved off. In ten seconds it was doing thirty miles an hour. With one accord the warders fired at it, but their bullets merely flattened themselves against those high sides, which were apparently of steel. In much less than a minute it was out of sight over the hill. The warder who had been on the wall was found in the road with a gag in his mouth and a sprain in his ankle.

## CHAPTER XXII

### IN THE CAR

IMMEDIATELY the attention of the warders in the field was monopolised by the rash performances of the gentleman-forgery, Abraham Crampiron, who had just deposited a barrowful of weeds on the pile near the gate, dropped the barrow and, forsaking for ever an employment which was entirely uncongenial to him and for which nature had not fitted him, ran to the gate and climbed over it with a celerity which was wonderful considering his age. A person out of the peculiarly shaped motor-car had meanwhile crept up behind the warder who was perched on the wall, and had in the basest manner tumbled him violently off the wall and gagged him. Crampiron waited in the shelter of the wall to see that this operation was properly done, and then he and the man sprang into the car from the side farthest from the field. The next instant the car was in rapid motion; the deafening noise of its engine had never ceased, and before the warders had finished flattening bullets against its armour, Crampiron was engaged in changing the suit he wore for something less conspicuous.

It was a neat conspiracy, and it proved once more that the prisoner on whose behalf his friends are prepared to spend unlimited money and much sheer intel-

lect, can escape from no matter what captivity. It had been an axiom in Dartmoor that escape was impossible—that even in a fog freedom won could not be maintained ; yet here, by the simplest and most expensive means, the impossible had been achieved. Evidently the conditions had been studied and the human and others tools selected with the minutest care and the finest judgment. But then minute care and fine judgment are the primary essentials of every large enterprise. The despatch of the governor and the governor's fast automobile, by means of a forged telegram, on a fool's errand to a remote part of the county, was an example of the loving workmanship with which the affair had been rounded off. The device of the forger's excursion up the field was an ingenious invention of Crampiron's own of which his rescuers knew nothing. It was not necessary, but it minimised the risk of Crampiron being shot, and it was, moreover, a pretty piece of embroidery, well worth its cost.

When the car had descended about a third of the long hill leading to Merivale, it stopped, and the little man who had unbalanced the warder and helped Crampiron into the car, said succinctly—

“Get out.”

As he uttered the words he tied Crampiron's necktie, and gave him a coat.

“My boots?” said Crampiron.

“Get out,” repeated the little man ; he had opened the door.

Crampiron obeyed. Before he could say a word the car, still barking horribly, had slid off down the hill. At the same moment another car, with a very large Limousine body, came at a fair pace up the hill. It stopped exactly opposite the unshod Crampiron. Its door opened, and a voice said—

“Quick!”

Crampiron jumped in, and the car continued its journey up the hill towards the prison and the dangers which Crampiron had just left. Within the car were a stout gentleman and an exceedingly stout old lady who kept fanning herself. It was the old gentleman who had invited Crampiron to be quick. He now invited Crampiron to lie down under the right-hand seat. When Crampiron had complied with this request, the old lady, who had occupied the major part of the left-hand seat, crossed over.

Within ten minutes of the departure of the armoured car from the vicinity of the potato field, the other car was arriving at the same field. A man with a gun stood in the middle of the road and shouted. The car came to a reluctant standstill at a distance of about two feet from the intrepid man with the gun.

“Look here,” protested angrily the chauffeur of the car, in the haughty accents of one accustomed to power, “you know quite well you have no right to play this sort of monkey-trick. Please get out of the way.”

"I beg pardon, sir," said the warder; "one of our prisoners has escaped."

"Oh! I see!" the chauffeur responded, instantly mollified. He looked across at the field, and saw a huddled group of convicts guarded by three warders, and another warder standing alone a little way off at a mysterious apparatus which was a telephone.

"Have you seen a motor-car with high grey sides, going in the direction of Tavistock?" the man with the gun enquired.

"Yes," said the chauffeur, "I met it down near Merivale. It was doing fifty miles an hour at least. You don't mean to say your convict was in that?"

"He was, sir."

"Well, I'd go after it with pleasure for you, only I can't do more than thirty. You'd better telephone to Tavistock. There's one thing, he's bound to stick to the main roads."

"Thank you, sir." The man limped aside.

"Hurt?"

"No, sir. Only a sprain."

The touring car proceeded on its dignified way to Two Bridges, where it stopped at the Two Bridges Hotel, gave the hotel the first exciting news of the escape, and bought petrol. The fat gentleman from the inside emerged and had a whiskey and soda in the bar and caused a cup of tea to be taken to the exceedingly fat lady. The equipage then left for Ashburton, and Crampiron's connection with Princetown was eternally severed. An interesting memento of

him, in the shape of the shattered fragments of the armoured car, was found two days later in the river near Harford Bridge on the Tavy.

After an hour or so behind the skirts of the old lady, it was suggested to Crampiron that he might come forth. The old gentleman had unaccountably vanished from the car. The old lady drew his attention to a basket of food which lay on the table between the seats. He ate. The old lady would not speak. She would do nothing but fan herself. The car frequently travelled at a pace far exceeding thirty miles an hour, but in traversing towns and villages it showed an admirable discretion. Several times in each hour it went through a village or a town. The sun gradually declined.

Then Crampiron witnessed a strange scene. The stout old lady removed her bodice and her skirt and much padding, and appeared as a slim man of no particular age. The slim man stuffed the discarded clothes, together with a wig, into a box under the table, from which box he took a bowler hat and a light overcoat. The car stopped on the borders of a large town, the young man descended and disappeared, and the journey was resumed. Crampiron was alone in the car. Since his expulsion without boots into the road, each event of the flight had been a separate astonishment to him. And further astonishment remained. The window at the front of the car was lowered by the chauffeur, who turned his goggles and furred head to speak.

"Get under the seat again," said the chauffeur.

Crampiron knew the voice. It was Maurice's voice.

He obeyed it. Dusk came on.

The car travelled for what appeared to Crampiron interminable leagues. Then there was a loud, unrestrained and continuous hooting, and the movement ceased for perhaps a minute; then the vehicle glided forward over very smooth ground for a time, and stopped finally. Everything was now dark. Crampiron heard the door of the car open, and the voice of Maurice telling him to emerge. He emerged, stiff, and was at once, rapidly but quite gently, blindfolded. Some one led him up several steps, and then along a level; he was pushed from behind, the click of a latch sounded, and he knew that he was ascending a lift. He was taken from the lift, the bandage was untied; he blinked, and saw that he was in the great illuminated chamber of the statue.

Maurice fronted him, Maurice covered with white dust from head to foot, the dust of over two hundred miles of English highways. The young man carried in his hand another basket of food.

"You will need something to eat," said he to Crampiron, putting the basket on the end of the long table. "I must leave you for a little while."

"But——"

Maurice, however, had departed.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### MAURICE AND THEN NORAH

A N hour later Maurice, who had been eating at the village inn and not in his house, was proceeding up the avenue to the statue. A woman followed him, unknown to himself, under the elms. He unlocked the door in the hem of the statue's robe and shut it behind him. Soon afterwards the woman unlocked the door and also entered the statue.

"Well," said Maurice to Crampiron, when he had mounted to the chamber, "I see you have eaten."

Crampiron gazed at him steadily.

"Why have I been kept without boots?" he demanded.

"I thought it was safer," said Maurice, simply. "I thought the absence of boots might prevent you from running off *en route*, if you got frightened and had a fancy to do so."

"Got frightened!" Crampiron repeated.

"Yes," said Maurice. "Do you suppose that you have no cause to be frightened?"

"See here, young man," Crampiron addressed him, "is it not about time that all this mystery ceased. Whom are you acting for?"

"I've been acting for myself," said Maurice.

"Whom did you imagine I was acting for? The British Government?"

"Yes," Crampiron answered.

Maurice, perceiving that Crampiron was entirely serious, laughed shortly; it was a laugh cruel in its bitterness.

"I thought that some one very important wanted me, to do something that nobody else could do," Crampiron explained, "and that it was going to be arranged afterwards that I was not to be recaptured."

"You're mistaken," said Maurice, coldly. "I am the only person that wanted you."

"All I can say is," said Crampiron, "that I'm very much obliged to you. It seems rather a weak expression, but I can't——"

"I wanted you, and I've got you," Maurice interrupted him.

Crampiron rose from his chair.

"What do you mean?" he asked in a strange tone.

"I've given six months to this little enterprise," Maurice went on. "For six months I've thought of nothing else. I've left my home, and my mother and sister and Berger, in order to devote myself to this. No one knows what I've been doing, except Curtis, and the strangers whom I've employed, and they don't know me. I had my special motor-car specially made without marks at a little manufactory in the south of France; I had the steel sides made elsewhere. I've spent quite a lot of money, and an incredible amount of trouble, to get you. I've used all the brains I have

to get you, because I wanted you. My wish is realised. You're here, and not a soul on earth knows it except Curtis and myself."

"Not Norah?"

"Norah!" Maurice exclaimed, with an appalling gesture.

Crampiron, whose firm demeanour gave scarcely the least indication that a few hours previously he had been a numbered item in a penitentiary, resumed his seat and tapped his fingers on the table. Then he said—

"And what are you going to do with me?"

"Can't you guess?"

Crampiron paused again.

"I haven't had time yet to collect my ideas," said he, sighing. "It seems hardly a moment since I was *there*, in that field trundling that cursed wheelbarrow . . . and now I'm here!" He passed his hand over his forehead and gazed at the table. There was something in the movement which gave a glimpse, as startling as it was brief, of the tremendous mental fatigue which he suffered under and which he concealed with such indomitable strength of will. Only a very strong man could have supported without collapse the crowded emotional and physical experiences of that day. "Pooh!" he exclaimed, collecting himself proudly. To look at him, in that neat grey suit and with that splendid calm, the history of the past year might have been, for him, nothing but a dream. He raised his glance to Maurice's face—Maurice was

standing close to him, silent—and after a long interval he murmured—

“There’s murder in your eyes, man.”

The words fell one by one uncannily on the hush of the chamber.

“No,” said Maurice. “Only justice!”

“You’ve rescued me merely in order to——?” he hesitated.

Maurice nodded.

“But what about Norah?” the older man cried passionately. The contrast of that passion with his previous coldness was disconcerting even to Maurice.

“Norah won’t know. No one will know, except Curtis and me. You will disappear. Curtis will attend to that.”

“That d——d Chinaman! You’re mad—that’s what you are. Things have preyed on your mind till it’s unhinged,” Crampiron muttered. “You’re obsessed by an idea. You’re——!” He jumped up.

Maurice stepped back, drawing a revolver from his pocket.

“I never was more sane,” said he. “But I have not forgotten my father. I have not forgotten my duty. And I have not forgotten my oath to myself!”

“To murder me?”

“No. To see that justice was done.”

“And do you intend to carry out your particular notion of justice here?”

“No.”

“Too close to your mother and sister, I suppose?

You're ashamed of it, after all. Your justice is what a plain person would call revenge."

"You seem to forget that you killed my father. You talk as if I were the criminal and not you."

Crampiron smiled scornfully.

"You've 'got' me, as you say; and you can kill me if you like. But I shall die despising you, as your father died despising me. He was right, and I shall be right. You have me now at a disadvantage. I'm weakened in mind by months of prison. I'm overcome with one surprise after another. I've had too many sensations to-day. Whereas you knew everything in advance, I never knew what was coming next. You gave the order, I obeyed. You drove, I was bundled under the seat. But you can't cow me, young man. You can't make me cringe to you. You can't even persuade me to appeal to you with the name of Norah. I'm your superior, and you know it."

"So my father despised you!" Maurice murmured sarcastically. "It was like him! And you have the assurance to tell me of his scorn! But his scorn of you was nothing to mine."

"*You* scorn me!" exclaimed Crampiron. "You aren't big enough to scorn me. You aren't your father. When I met him—that night—I was coming out of the statue. He saw me shutting the door. I had been beforehand with him. I had acquired the most precious of all his secrets, the secret of the statue. I'd bought it, by the way. He perceived at

once that though he'd beaten me on the particular question of the Moroccan loan, he would never be able to beat me again by the same means. He perceived that the sole virtue of the statue, the fact of its secret remaining a secret, was gone, and that all his labour and all his money had been wasted. He knew that Beakbane, the man whom he had trusted completely, was a scoundrel, and that his judgment of character was seriously at fault. Was he angry? Did he lose control of himself? Did he stoop to vituperation and threats of revenge? No; he remained as calm as I am at this moment—much calmer. In the hour of his greatest trial he put into practice his theories of existence. Oh! I knew! I could see! It's only a man such as I am that can appreciate such a man as your father was. I can recognise greatness when I come across it.”

“Yet you brutally murdered him!”

“No! I simply gave way to a fatal impulse of annoyance at being forced to admit to myself that your father's was a greater soul than mine. I had robbed him of his secret——”

“How did he know that you had robbed him of his secret? The secret is not in this part of the statue. And you killed him on the plinth.”

“He knew because he saw in my hand a little tool that no one who didn't know the secret of the statue could have used. It was the tool that puzzled everybody at my trial.”

“What was it?”

"If you don't know, why should I tell you? Find Beakbane, and make him tell you. He's in possession of it."

"And I shall be in possession of him one of these days. Go on."

"I will go on solely for the reason that to go on will be to humiliate you with the contrast between you and your father. He must have seen the instrument in my hand all the time; but he made no reference to it till just as he was turning away. Then he said: 'Now, Crampiron, give me that thing, if you please.' I could tell from his tone that he was absolutely sure of being obeyed. And that—your father's calm certainty that he had a more powerful will than mine—made me furious. I said I wouldn't give him the thing. He came close up to me. 'Yes, you will,' he said. 'Why?' I demanded. 'Because I'm Courlander and you are Crampiron.' It was his cool belief in his moral power that put me beside myself. I had to give him the instrument. So I gave it him—in his heart. The cur in me killed him. His dying thought was that I had sunk to the cur. Once he had admired me. And that will be my dying thought of you, Maurice Courlander."

Crampiron stared coldly at the son of his victim, and Maurice sustained the gaze with an equally invincible firmness.

"And now you shall tell me the secret of the statue," said he.

Crampiron sneered.

"Try to make me!" he replied. "Try! You can kill me. I see you are already a monomaniac on that point. Therefore argument is useless. But try to make me talk!"

"We'll see," Maurice muttered, and left him.

Abraham Crampiron put his arms on the table and laid his head in the hollow of his left elbow, and instantly went to sleep. It was not a symptom of astounding self-command and spiritual calmness under stress; it was merely the natural result of excessive exhaustion. He was awakened, however, almost as soon as he had lost consciousness, by the soft pressure of a hand on his forehead. He roused himself with a start; over him was bending the tear-wet face of the woman who had followed Maurice into the statue.

"Father," she murmured, "I have heard everything that you and Maurice have said."

The frigid and stern habits of a lifetime fought then against an impulse in Crampiron's breast, and they were defeated. The old man drew the girl to him with a fierce gesture and feverishly kissed her. Many strange things had happened to Norah in her brief career, but that kiss was the strangest of all. It caused her body to shake with sobs.

"I have a key," she explained brokenly, clinging to him, "and I came into the statue after Maurice. I had seen him in the grounds. I don't think Millicent knows that he is here. I meant to be reconciled with him, or else . . . , else to kill myself. I brought the

lift down, and came up in it, as quietly as I could, and then I heard voices. And I listened. I should have come into the room. I was just deciding to come in, when he surprised me by rushing out. I only had time to hide in the service-room. Father, don't let us waste time in talking. Let us go."

"What are we to do?" murmured Crampiron, apparently despairing. "What can we do against a madman?"

"I have a key. Once out in the grounds, we are safe. We can appeal to Millicent—to any one."

"What then? I shall only be caught and given up. Once the fact gets about that I am here, the game's over."

"Come, father," the girl insisted imperiously, with eyes suddenly flashing, and she raised him from the chair. "To please me."

He followed her, inspired by her energy. They reached the lift-well. The lift was at the bottom of the shaft, where Maurice had left it. Norah touched the button which should have caused it to ascend, but there was no answering movement of the wire ropes. She glanced at her father in dismay.

"Of course he's left the door open at the bottom. Nothing will make the lift stir till that door is closed. He's done it on purpose. It wasn't to be supposed that he would leave me free to play with the lift. I might have been capable of bursting the outer door. We're trapped till he chooses to return and finish his work."

And Crampiron gave a queer laugh.

"Then we will wait together for him," said Norah, quietly.

When, tragically silent, they had been seated a few moments side by side in the chamber, Crampiron sprang up as though he had received a violent shock of electricity.

"I'm losing my senses," he exclaimed. "What's the good of knowing the secret of the statue if I don't make use of it?"

He rushed to the wall on the right of the door. It was a white plaster wall, with a frieze carved in low relief under the ceiling, and a dado beneath. The dado was separated from the upper plain space of the wall by a decorative band designed in a pattern of leaves with a small raised circle, conventionally representing a seed, between each pair of leaves. Crampiron began to count the seeds, starting from the door.

"It's the thirteenth," he said.

He counted thirteen, pressed on the thirteenth circle, and then counted again.

"What are you doing?"

"The other exit is through here," he answered. "Ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen."

Then he pressed once more on the circle, but with no visible result.

He looked at Norah.

"What is it, father?"

"The whole of that part of the dado," he replied,

"is a panel that gives way when the spring is touched, and leads to a staircase."

"Have you pushed the right one?" she demanded excitedly.

"Yes," he said. "I've pushed the right one."

"Then?"

"It doesn't work. It simply means that the spring has been locked on the other side."

"Who could have fastened it?"

"There is only one man who could have locked it—Beakbane. No one else knows of it."

"Beakbane?"

"Yes. And what's more, he's in the statue now. He must be. He would have freed the spring before leaving. He's in the statue now." Crampiron's voice rose to a cry of anger and rage.

"Father!"

"I tell you he's in the statue now!" yelled the old man. "My God! If I had him here——!"

He staggered back to a chair, and fell into it.

"Father," the girl enjoined him proudly, "we can do nothing if you aren't calm. Emile Berger and the police have been trying to catch Beakbane for weeks and weeks. They will do it now."

"That won't help us!" muttered Crampiron, his extraordinary fury subsiding. "However, there's nothing to do but wait. Nevertheless," he resumed after a pause, "I think we'll wait in the dark. When Maurice does come, I may be able to do something in the dark."

He turned off the lights by means of the switch, and he was in the act of going out to the lift-well, when he went back and relighted the chamber.

"Norah," he said quietly, taking her hand, "remember this! If anything happens to me, you are to send five thousand pounds—don't forget—five thousand pounds, to Mrs. Alexander Wayne, 321 Old Kent Road, London. 321—fix the number in your head. You'll remember?"

"Yes, father," she replied.

At the same moment they both witnessed a rapid, noiseless movement of the dado to the right of the door. It sank magically without a sound below the level of the floor, and showed a cavity. A man half stepped from the cavity into the chamber; then, seeing that the room was not empty, he tried to retreat. But Crampiron dashed at him and dragged him forth. It was Beakbane.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE TUNNEL

**I**T was not for nothing that Abraham Crampiron had been weeding potatoes and trundling heavy barrows on Dartmoor. He caught Beakbane in the grasp of a man who was accustomed to being obeyed by his muscles. With one hand gripping either shoulder, he drew him forth from the modesty of his retreat and flung him into the room. Beakbane's head resounded against a chair, which, yielding to that hardness, fell over.

Norah stepped aside, as a woman will and must when she is expecting violence between two males. But in expecting violence she was wrong. Beakbane had no intention of being violent. He perceived instantly that his one chance of defending himself against the tempestuous hostility of his former employer was to make absolutely no show of defence.

Therefore he lay stretched on the floor with his head slightly raised, and meekness in his eyes and in the gesture of his hands. If his emotions had not been monopolised by fear, he would have been in the highest degree surprised by this encounter with Crampiron. Crampiron out of prison, Crampiron in civilised raiment (save for the absence of boots),

Crampiron in one of his old moods of furious command—such a spectacle might have astounded a much more phlegmatic person than Beakbane, and frightened a braver.

“Didn’t expect to see me here!” Crampiron thundered, after he had shut the panel.

“No, sir,” Beakbane agreed.

“Never expected to have the pleasure of meeting me again?”

“Er——”

A question demanding diplomacy in the reply!

“Never expected to have the pleasure of meeting me again?” Crampiron shouted.

“No, sir.”

“Get up.”

Beakbane got up.

“You scoundrel!”

No answer.

“You scoundrel, I say! Aren’t you?”

“Yes, sir.”

It seemed a shame that a man in so elegant a necktie should be forced to such humiliation.

“You sold Courlander’s secrets to me. I bought you and paid for you, didn’t I?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then immediately my back was turned”—this was Crampiron’s way of referring to his imprisonment—“you sold yourself and my secrets to France. How much did you get from Paris for that bit of work? How much did they send you from the Quai d’Orsay?”

“Tw—twenty-five thousand francs, sir.”

“Not a lot! But much more than you were worth.  
Who knows you are here?”

“No one, sir.”

“Been using the place for your own purposes! I suppose you used it to make me look a fool with Lord Doncastle about the Morocco loan? I suppose you came here to ruin the negotiations?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I knew it. I guessed that six months ago. And all the time you were smiling and smirking at me when you came to see me in prison.”

No reply.

“Eh?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And may I respectfully enquire what you’re doing here now? You can’t be swindling me. You’re swindling some one else?”

“I——”

“Swindling some one else?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Who’s your accomplice?”

“A clerk in Mendelssohn’s, sir.”

“At Berlin?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Stock manipulation?”

“Yes, sir. But this is my last visit to the statue, sir, I assure you. I’m going to leave England.”

“A blow for the country, Beakbane! Precisely

how much money shall you take with you? Now answer me."

"About seventy thousand pounds, sir."

"Well," said Crampiron, "I have my own affairs to think about, though you might not think it. You'll see in the papers to-morrow that I have left Dartmoor with a certain absence of formality. Never mind how I got here. The point is that I want to get out of here with the minimum of publicity. You came in—down yonder, didn't you?" He jerked his head.

"Yes, sir."

"And you'll go out the same way. It's quite safe?"

"Yes, sir."

"You shall escort us there. You shall see that the coast is clear. And look! If anything happens to me, something will happen to you. Understand! If I had been alone when I caught you, you might have been dead by this time. And it really astonishes me that I have not already given you a thrashing. However, lead the way. And don't hurry. Stop! Empty your pockets first."

Beakbane began to comply.

"Your breast pocket too."

"But—"

"Your breast pocket too, I say!"

And Beakbane was obliged to deposit an over-indulged pocket-book, with less valuable belongings, on the table. Then Crampiron, who had learnt practically, within the last year, how effective searching is done, searched Beakbane.

"Good. Go ahead. Norah, you come after me."

He had the air of conducting an expedition of victory. No one could have surmised from his demeanour that, with Beakbane as a tool, he was playing for his own life against the revengeful madness of Maurice.

The three people passed, one after the other, through the aperture, which now reopened quite easily, and Norah found herself immediately at the top of a curving flight of steps. Beakbane had touched a switch, and the steps became faintly illuminated by tiny electric lamps. But light was not lavishly provided. The descending spiral of the white stone staircase appeared to be interminable to Norah. There were hundreds of steps, each exactly like all the rest, narrowing to the central column. It appeared to her that there were thousands. And still they descended, her father keeping close to Beakbane, and she keeping close to her father, and no word being spoken by any of them.

Then Beakbane touched another switch, and Norah saw a long dark tunnel stretching in front of her. It was a white tunnel, little more than six feet in height and two feet in width. For a great distance this tunnel sloped downwards, and then it became level; and through the roof was perceptible a faint radiance. An electric lamp afar off made a globe of yellow in the long horizontal stretch. They had already passed seven such lamps.

"Where are we?" Norah whispered to her father,

"Under the lake now," he said. "This takes us to the boat-house. The moon must be very bright." He pointed upwards to the radiance from the roof.

And Norah saw that the roof here was of glass.

Just when they reached the eighth electric lamp, Beakbane gave a gasp.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but I've left the key upstairs."

Crampiron seized his arm, and interrogated that face. He satisfied himself at once that the man was in an agony of fear lest his carelessness should bring down on his shoulders a wrath greater than he could bear.

"Where did you leave it?"

"Up there——"

"In the top?"

"Yes, sir."

"Run, run!" Crampiron ordered. "We'll wait here. And mind, no tricks! I may tell you the other exit is not in working order."

Beakbane ran, his steps echoing diminuendo down the tunnel.

Crampiron and his daughter proceeded till they reached a short rising flight of steps at the top of which could be dimly discerned a wall. The light at the middle of the subaqueous part of the tunnel now shone distantly behind them.

"When he comes back," said Crampiron, "you shall go first, Norah, not Beakbane. You can slip out and see if any one is about. If you do happen to be seen,

no one will suppose you have come out of the boat-house. Whereas Beakbane——”

“They have been watching the boat-house for weeks, father,” said Norah.

“Who have?”

“The police.”

“For Beakbane.”

“Yes.”

“And they’ve never caught him! Then he must have some way of outwitting them. He shall teach me that way. Sit down and rest, girl.”

Several minutes elapsed—ten, perhaps fifteen. And there was no sign nor symptom of Beakbane’s reappearance in the tunnel.

“I’ll go and bring him by the scruff of the neck,” Crampiron exclaimed at last impatiently. “Don’t move.”

“But, father!”

“My child,” he said, quite tenderly, “you must obey me. Remember I’m in a serious case. Don’t be misled by my looks into thinking that I’m out for a picnic. I’m not. Stay here. If I have to—do anything to Beakbane when I meet him, I don’t want you to be near. That’s all.”

And he left her alone there, sitting obediently on the stone.

He climbed the spiral staircase, with its hundreds of steps, at surprising speed, and when he arrived at the aperture leading to the great chamber, he was slightly out of breath. Instead of going into the

chamber, he continued up the staircase, which was lost in darkness above. Immediately afterwards he heard the sound of a scuffle high over him in the gloom of the stairs. Then he heard a voice. He hesitated, turned back, and went into the chamber. From his concealment he saw Beakbane fly in a dangerous helter-skelter down the staircase. A few seconds later another figure followed, even more rapidly, and Crampiron could not identify it. Then he heard a fall and recovery. The second figure, apparently not accustomed to the steps, had been taking them at too great a pace. Crampiron listened, and the sounds of flight and pursuit gradually died away in the invisible depths of the staircase scores of fathoms below.

"They won't do anything to Norah, anyhow," he murmured. "I'd better wait here a little."

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE SECRET

Maurice, after leaving Crampiron, went straight to the house. It was a long time since he had been seen there, and several servants saluted him with that freedom to which a faithful servant is entitled upon such a reappearance. Maurice, however, almost ignored the courtesies. He was going straight to find Millicent, when he met Millicent coming downstairs. She was quite willing to be effusive, but Maurice would have no effusiveness. He asked absently after his mother, who had gone to bed, and after Emile Berger, who had gone to Paris on family business: and then he said—

“Norah’s here, isn’t she?”

“Why, Maurice!” Millicent exclaimed, “what’s the matter? You’re crying! What’s happened?”

“Nothing!” he said abruptly. “Is Norah here, or isn’t she?”

“She is here, of course,” said Millicent. “I considered it right for her to be here. And she has been here for several months. She went out into the gardens for a walk. I was just coming to join her.”

“Well, don’t!” Maurice replied shortly.

And he rushed from the landing where they had

been talking, next to a Naiad by Rodin, and so by the terrace into the gardens.

As, with eyes alert for her in the moonlight, he searched for Norah, he happened to see a man standing by the boat-house. He approached this man to inquire as to Norah, and was astounded to meet Carfax the detective. His first suspicion was that after all the police had outwitted him in the matter of Crampiron. But he soon discovered that this was not so. Carfax, though all London was thrilling at that moment to the news of Crampiron's sensational escape, had not even heard of the escape. Carfax was at Tudor Hundreds at the instance of Berger, who, disquieted by strange and inexplicable visitations to the statue, had invoked Scotland Yard on Maurice's behalf and with the consent of Millicent. Carfax, indeed, as Maurice found, was anticipating an immediate and a dramatic triumph. He had, after interminable researches, hit upon a moving flagstone in the platform of the interior of the boat-house, and, further, he had conclusively established that the unlawful visitant to the statue was Beakbane. He took from his pocket, for Maurice's inspection, a common household steel for sharpening knives, which he had hammered and filed at the thinner end. He then knelt down on the platform and invited Maurice to do likewise. He struck a match and pointed out that the stone was of a porous variety with a number of small indentations on its surface. How natural, he said to Maurice, would be the assumption that such stone

had been specially chosen on account of the water which would drip from the oars of rowers coming ashore. Impossible to wet one's feet on it! Then, with a little difficulty, he inserted his steel into a most innocent indentation, gave it a twist, and lo! the entire flag, hinged on one side, sank away and disclosed a cavity.

"How far have you been down there?" Maurice asked, amazed and exceedingly disturbed.

"I have not been."

"Why not?"

"Beakbane is somewhere down there in the statue. The tunnel must be very long. Only this evening have I understood that stone and made that instrument. I am waiting for Beakbane to come out. He must come out. When he does, there will be a surprise for him."

"Why haven't you gone after him?"

"It is safer to wait for him here, sir. Much safer! He knows more of what's down there than I do. He might do something desperate if he caught me at a disadvantage. I'm not a soldier nor a prizefighter. I'm a detective."

"I shall go," said Maurice, suddenly.

"I should respectfully suggest——"

"I shall go," Maurice repeated.

"Then, sir, I will go with you," said the detective.

"No," said Maurice, coldly, "I prefer to go alone."

There was finality in his voice. Carfax had a clear notion of the boundaries of his duty, and he calmly

acquiesced. He had warned Maurice, and it was not his business to do more. As for Maurice, the secret of the statue beckoned him on, the impulse to rush forward was irresistible. And this impulse was reinforced by another which urged in the same direction—the impulse to meet Beakbane on the instant and handle him. He had no faintest fear of exploring the statue alone. On the contrary, it would have been inept to have taken the distinguished emissary of Scotland Yard into the statue in which was the escaped criminal whom Scotland Yard was doubtless at that very hour using all its vast powers to apprehend. The extreme propinquity of Carfax and Crampiron the one to the other that night was fate's irony at the expense of the police.

So Maurice descended into the cavity.

"You see this stone is very thin," said the detective. "Knock on it when you return. I shall close it, because if any one else happens to come along, I don't want the opening to be seen."

And he handed a small lantern to Maurice and shut the stone.

Maurice at once penetrated into the tunnel which, about half an hour later, was to be traversed by Crampiron and Norah. He carefully examined it, and saw that it ran under the lake and that the roof was of glass. He also examined his revolver, and kept the ray of his lantern pointing straight ahead. To him the tunnel appeared to be of fantastic length. Presently it began to rise, and he inferred that he was

under the avenue of elms. At last he came to the end and to the spiral flight of steps, and there had been no sign of Beakbane, no sign of any living organism. Many times had he to renew his patience as he gradually accomplished that nerve-straining and monotonous ascent. He unsuspectingly passed the aperture leading to the great chamber while Beakbane was undergoing his ordeal there at the hands of Abraham Crampiron. Shortly afterwards he accidentally dropped his lamp, which went out, and though he searched carefully, it eluded him. He decided to go forward in the dark.

Then the spiral ended, he felt a door, which yielded to his push, and, holding his hands outstretched and apart, he entered what he knew must be a room of some sort. There was not a ray of light, nor the least sound. He hesitated. Suddenly he lowered his right arm and drew his revolver. He had heard a noise. It might have been a breath, a sigh, a clock, a tick, a scratch. It was repeated. It recurred frequently, at irregular intervals, long and short, but always exceedingly faint. Maurice's mind ran away to the hall of his club and the tape-machines therein. He comprehended. A message was being sent, somehow, from somewhere, into the summit of the statue! Instinctively he stepped back, and his fingers touched a knob which he recognised as an electric switch. The next moment he had flooded the place with light.

During the space of perhaps three pulse-beats he was mystified. He saw a huge chamber, roughly

spherical in shape, and gathered that he was in the head of the statue, just underneath the pointed crown of the great goddess of Energy, at more than twice the height of the highest elm-tops. He saw in the midst a large table, on which was some delicate and complex apparatus. He saw a paper slowly revolving on a cylinder under a pencil that descended and irregularly struck the paper. He saw in a corner a tremendous series of electrical accumulators. Yet the table and its contents were completely isolated. The apparatus ticked away, unconnected with anything whatever.

Then he understood. The solution of the enigma of the statue swept over him. And he wondered, he was amazed, that he had never before thought of an explanation so obvious. The statue was a wireless telegraphy station! Hence its height. Hence the crown, with its metal points. Hence the inexplicable leakage of electricity from the electric light plant; doubtless the main cable to the house had been tapped for the supply of the accumulators. Hence the bell and coil and box in his father's bedroom! Why had it occurred to no one that the statue was a wireless telegraphy station in disguise?

The cylinder ceased to revolve, and there was a silence.

He approached the table.

Yes. There were the battery, the relay, the ticker, the tuning wings, and the surpassingly ingenious coherer. He remembered having seen illustrations of

such things in an American magazine. Everything was fine, exiguous, fragile, and marvellously adjusted. His father might have been depended upon to have the most perfect installation that wealth and enthusiasm could achieve. His tremendous admiration for his father broke out anew in his mind. What an imagination, what an audacity in conception, what an incredible patience in execution, that man had had! As a financier of European activities, he had seen the possibilities of wireless telegraphy in his business. And he had seen also how those possibilities would be multiplied if the thing could be maintained an absolute secret. How to erect a station with the altitude of several hundred feet necessary for long-distance work, without proclaiming at once to the whole earth the exact nature of your enterprise? To that question the idea of an heroic statue was the reply.

It was unique in its daring and superb simplicity. It was so brilliant that its brilliance brought the tears to Maurice's eyes. With that miraculous machine at his command Carl Courlander could, and would, have puzzled the world. And just when it was completed, death had overtaken Carl at the foot of his statue! Maurice recalled Crampiron's narration of the last fatal interview and his father's indestructible calm even in face of that supreme disappointment and deception! Carl Courlander had made only one mistake in his career, but that one mistake was capital. He had trusted Slade Beakbane.

Maurice tore the paper off the cylinder, and tried

to decipher the dotted message. The little red code-book was close at hand. He translated the message into letters, but the letters would not form themselves into recognisable words of any language that Maurice was even distantly acquainted with. A cipher, of course! And in the second part of the book he discovered the key to the cipher. In a few minutes he had reduced it to sense, and the sense to which he reduced it constituted not the least of the excitations through which he had passed that day. The message, which was in German, read—

“Beakbane. Agreed. Will destroy your station at midnight.—Strauss. Berlin.”

The statue was therefore in communication with Berlin. It might indeed be in communication with half a dozen centres. And the curious thing was that though those centres might be aware to whom they were talking, they might be totally unaware of the situation and the physical peculiarities of this centre in Bedfordshire. The apparatus might be fulfilling all its functions, and yet preserve its secrecy!

“Destroy your station!” What could it mean?

It was certainly a reply to a request from Beakbane. As Maurice perpended, his eye caught a thin wire that went from the apparatus to a box on a corner of the table. And he remembered that gun-cotton could be exploded by wireless telegraphy. Was it imaginable that the miserable Beakbane had finished

with the statue and meant to appease the grudge which he undoubtedly had against Maurice by arranging to blow the head off the statue? The trick was a feasible one, and Maurice felt that Beakbane was perfectly capable of sinking to the level of no matter what meanness.

His glance roamed over the table. And there, near the strange box, was the still stranger instrument which had figured so startlingly at Crampiron's trial. Its similarity to the steel of Carfax struck Maurice at once. Of course it was the key to the secret entrance at the boat-house, fashioned so that no one could suspect it of being a key! He picked it up. It had been cleansed of its stains.

Then Maurice heard steps on the spiral stairway.

Beakbane! He had forgotten the corporeal side of Beakbane in speculating upon Beakbane's misdeeds!

He rushed out. Beakbane, evidently made cautious by the light, was coming up. Maurice jumped down upon him in a passion to destroy. Beakbane sprang aside. Maurice stumbled and dropped the key. With a movement of surprising feline swiftness Beakbane snatched the key and fled. The man had, perhaps, seen his death in the eyes of Maurice. Maurice pulled himself together and followed at his best speed. His best speed was too good, for he fell again. It was this second fall that Crampiron, whose ambush Maurice did not notice in his haste, had heard. Thenceforward he descended more carefully, and Beakbane gradually increased his lead. What

Maurice did notice was that the stairway was now lighted. Arrived at the bottom, he saw Beakbane in the far distance of the tunnel, and began to run hard. He gained on him perceptibly, but not sufficiently; and at the beginning of that half-mile of tunnel which lay under the ornamental water, Beakbane was a hundred yards ahead.

"If I don't catch him," Maurice muttered, breathless, "he will knock at the trap, and he may very probably kill Carfax. Well, I can't catch him, and at this distance I certainly can't hit him; but I can drown him."

He drew his revolver and fired point-blank at one of the glass squares of the roof. The first shot cracked it; the second made a hole; the third demolished it. Water poured down into the tunnel in a stream two feet square. Maurice stood his ground, and smashed two more squares. Then, with the water already up to his middle, he fled for safety up the inclined part of the tunnel. Beakbane was certainly gone to his account.

Maurice, all dripping, remounted to the statue, and met Crampiron on the stairway.

"So you and Beakbane are in league after all!" said Maurice. "Well, you're too late. He's drowned."

"What?" cried Crampiron, in terror.

Maurice calmly explained.

"Come upstairs! Come upstairs!" said Crampiron, and clutched at Maurice's arm. "Quick! And do something to get out the other way! You've

drowned Norah! I tell you Norah was in the tunnel."

Somewhat the two men reached the great chamber.

"No! It's too late!" the old man murmured, and the sight of his distress was terrible. "Too late!"

Not for the first time in his life was he using that phrase. He had employed it to Norah on the evening of his death sentence.

Maurice moved as it were in a tragic dream to the lift-well. And the lift was coming up. It stopped, and opened, and Norah emerged from it.

"I heard the water, and felt it," she explained. "And I screamed out, and some one opened the trap from the other side. Then I ran here . . . Maurice!"

Maurice had fainted.

He came to with the feel of her hand on his face.

Scarcely a word was spoken. But Norah and her father knew that Maurice had awakened, not only from a swoon, but out of the long nightmare of his revenge.

There was, for the moment at any rate, no scene of unrestrained affection. Curtis arrived, perhaps opportunely, perhaps inopportunely; and unrestrained scenes of any kind could not occur in the presence of Curtis.

"Car destroyed, sir. In river," said he, coldly. He was still wearing his goggles, and through them he gazed at the group with a calm sublimely indifferent. If ever Curtis was to be astonished, he should have

been astonished then. But he gave no signs of astonishment. When he was informed of the mishap that had occurred to Beakbane, he faintly smiled. And when Maurice, suddenly remembering the purport of the message in the head of the statue, told Crampiron about it, and threw even Crampiron into an agitation, Curtis looked at his watch, and blandly remarked that it was ten minutes to midnight. Crampiron hastened upstairs, and by the simple device of smashing the coherer and scattering its silver and nickel filings to the four corners of the room, rendered impotent the activities of the man at Berlin.

For three months Crampiron remained concealed in the statue, and his existence there was never revealed to any one but Emile Berger and Millicent. When the hounds of pursuit had ceased to bay, he unostentatiously went to live in the beautiful climate of Algiers, where his daughter and son-in-law visit him upon occasion. Scotland Yard is at a loss. But any official of Dartmoor will still assure the inquirer that escape is an impossibility. Illusions are adamant to the assault of facts.

THE END

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